

## The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa (4th–6th Centuries)

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# The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa (4th–6th Centuries)

*Augustine of Hippo, His Contemporaries  
and Early Reception*

*By*

Matthieu Pignot



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# Abbreviations

Abbreviations for books of the Bible adopt the following style: 1 Cor 2, 6; Ps 26, 5. Psalms are quoted according to the Septuagint numbering. Most abbreviations of journal titles are taken from the *Année Philologique*. All other abbreviations are listed here:

ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers. The Works of the Father in Translation</i> (New York-Ramsey NJ-Mahwah NJ)
AL	<i>Augustinus-Lexikon</i> (Basel)
BT	<i>Bibliotheca scriptorum graecorum et romanorum Teubneriana</i> (Berlin)
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i> (Turnhout)
CLA	Lowe, E.A., <i>Codices Latini Antiquiores: a palaeographical guide to Latin manuscripts prior to the ninth century</i> (Oxford)
CPL	Dekkers, E., (1995), <i>Clavis patrum latinorum</i> , 3rd edition (Steenbrugge)
CPPM	Machielsen, J., (1990), <i>Clavis Patristica Pseudepigraphorum Medii Aevi</i> , part 1: Opera homiletica, 2 volumes (Turnhout)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna-Salzburg)
DACL	<i>Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie</i> (Paris)
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i> (Paris)
EphLit	<i>Ephemerides Liturgicae</i> (Rome)
FOC	<i>The Fathers of the Church, a new translation</i> (Washington D.C.)
LMD	<i>La Maison-Dieu</i> (Paris)
MA	<i>Miscellanea Agostiniana</i> , (1930–1931), 2 volumes (Rome)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> (Berlin)
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (Paris)
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Paris)
PLS	<i>Patrologia Latina Supplementum</i> (Paris)
QL	<i>Questions liturgiques</i> (Leuven)
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart)
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> (Lyon)
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i> (Leuven)
SPM	<i>Stromata Patristica et Mediaevalia</i> (Utrecht)
WSA	<i>The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century</i> (New York)



# Introduction

In 427–428, Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 395/396 to 430, replied to a letter of the Carthaginian aristocrat Firmus, an eager reader of the *De civitate Dei*. While praising his learning and entrusting him with the spread of one of the major works of his life, the bishop was dissatisfied with the religious status of his correspondent: he was only a catechumen and thus should seek baptism as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup> Firmus, however, had no intention to quickly seek baptism and followed his own slow approach to Christianity, as he said to Augustine: “For a man promises a greater reverence for the faith if, in coming to the awesome secrets of the sacred mystery, he approaches its greater depths with hesitation”.<sup>2</sup> This book seeks to understand better this peculiar way of becoming and being Christian and its importance in early Christianity.

Despite Augustine’s attempt to overcome it, Firmus’ status was not an exception but rather the norm for any convert integrating Christian communities at his time. While full belonging was acquired through baptism since the first century, becoming Christian did not simply mean being baptised. In Late Antiquity, Christian communities were divided between those who were being initiated, the catechumens, and the baptised Christians. The technical term *κατηχούμενος* designating this category of Christians—later transposed in Latin as *catechumenus*—, derived from *κατηχῆν* (instruct orally), originally meaning instruction resounding in someone’s ear. Individuals from any background entering Christian communities first became catechumens, progressively integrating into the community through teaching and rituals, and received baptism only later, if they wished so and were granted admission on the basis of the progress made.

This organisation, which has been called the catechumenate in scholarship since the seventeenth century,<sup>3</sup> can be traced back in the West to the late second century at least. In Latin, the first dated mentions of *catechumeni* as a separate group within the Christian community are found in late second- and

1 Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 3.

2 Firmus in Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 6: “*Et religioni [...] hac tarditate proficitur. Nam maiorem fidei reverentiam pollicetur qui in augusta sacri mysterii secreta venturus ad remotiora cunctanter accedit*” (Divjak, *BA* 46B (1987), 68; Teske, *WSA* 11/4 (2005), 234).

3 The word *catechumenatus* is never found in early Christian and medieval sources. I first found it used in Aubespine, G. de l’ (1623), *De Veteribus Ecclesiae Ritibus, Observationum Libri duo* (Paris), 62 commenting on the canons about catechumens in the collection of the so-called council of Elvira.

third-century Africa.<sup>4</sup> While only generic references are provided at this stage and no details are given about the concrete organisation of the catechumenate, the Carthaginian writer Tertullian (c. 160–after 220AD), already distinguishes *catechumeni* from *fideles* (the baptised Christians), suggesting a peculiar status of catechumens was in place at this period, also employing the terms *audientes* (hearers) and *novitoli* (beginners) in connection to their being instructed through preaching.<sup>5</sup> Criticising opponents about their lack of enforcement of any distinction between the two groups, Tertullian also provides the earliest reference to the enforcement of ritual distinctions, in particular for the celebration of the Eucharist, restricted to the baptised.<sup>6</sup> Candidates to baptism, as Tertullian tells us in his treatise *De baptismo* addressing them, were taught the Christian faith and performed a number of preparative rituals including prayers, fasting, vigils and penance, with baptismal rituals taking place at Easter as the preferred but not compulsory date.<sup>7</sup> Both children and adults were initiated, although Tertullian speaks in favour of a proper preparation for baptism, suggesting that children should be encouraged to postpone baptism until they are able to understand the instruction.<sup>8</sup> For Tertullian, a proper preparation and initiation should not only mean acquiring the Christian faith but also committing to rules of behaviour and renouncing one's former way of life

- 4 For detailed studies of this early evidence see in particular (with further bibliography): Dujarier, M., (1962a), *Le parrainage des adultes aux trois premiers siècles de l'Église* (Paris), 218–237; Saxer, V., (1988), *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du I<sup>er</sup> au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Esquisse historique et signification d'après leurs principaux témoins* (Spoleto), 122–143; Harmless, W., (2014), *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 2nd edition (Collegeville MN), 37–56.
- 5 As noted by Rebillard (2012a), 11 and Rebillard, E., 'Becoming Christian in Carthage in the Age of Tertullian', in Bøgh (2014a), 47–58, at 48. See Tertullian, *De Corona* 2, 1 listing catechumens as the lowest rank in the Church; *Adversus Marcionem* v, 7 making a clear distinction between *fideles* and *catechumeni* of Marcion and for the same distinction, *De praescriptione* (variant: *praescriptionibus*) *haereticorum* 41 (see below). For *audientes* and *novitoli*: *De paenitentia* 6, 1 and 6, 14–17.
- 6 Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.2: "Inprimis quis catechumenus, quis fidelis incertum est, pariter adeunt, pariter audiunt, pariter orant; etiam ethnici si supervenerint sanctum canibus et porcis margaritas, licet non veras, iactabunt" (Refoulé, CCL 1 (1954), 221); see also, about the dismissal of catechumens before celebration of the Eucharist, *De anima* 9.
- 7 Tertullian, *De baptismo* 20, 1: "Ingressuros baptismum orationibus crebris, ieiuniis et geniculationibus et pervigiliis orare oportet [et] cum confessione omnium retro delictorum" (Borleffs, CCL 1 (1954), 294); for the time of baptism see 19, 1–3. *De praescriptione haereticorum* 36 connects the teaching of elements of the creed to baptism. For Tertullian, baptism was notably preceded by a renunciation of the Devil and profession of faith, see *De anima* 35, 3; *De corona* 3, 2; *De idololatria* 6, 1–2; *De spectaculis* 4, 1 and 24.
- 8 Tertullian, *De baptismo* 18, 5: "Veniant ergo dum adolescent, dum discunt, dum quo veniant docentur; fiant christiani cum christum nosse potuerint" (Borleffs, CCL 1 (1954), 293).

prior to baptism.<sup>9</sup> In connection to the transformation brought by the initiation into Christianity, Tertullian particularly speaks against idolatry, attending shows and serving in the army.<sup>10</sup> As Tertullian's exhortations show, this change, however, was not straightforward. Most candidates being adults, Tertullian notes that they could wish to remain catechumens, postponing baptism to avoid any definitive commitment.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Tertullian's insistence on a proper preparation could also be directed against hastily bringing catechumens to baptism without training. Thus, already in this early period, catechumens appear as a sensitive group because of their peculiar intermediary position in the community and because the rules and organisation of the catechumenate were open to debate. As this book will show, Tertullian's anxiety anticipates what would become an important concern of Augustine and other clerics in later centuries.

In the mid-third century, the writings of Cyprian, bishop and martyr of Carthage (c. 200–258AD), corroborate Tertullian's evidence with a few other mentions of *catechumeni* and the alternative term *audientes*. He emphasises that catechumens are already integrated into the community as they have faith in God and knowledge of the Trinity. At the same time, they need to commit to a real change of their way of life, receiving dedicated teaching before baptism provided by *doctores*—not better identified—and undergoing exorcism to expel the Devil.<sup>12</sup> They are Christians in the making; as such, Cyprian advoc-

9 Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 6, 8; 6, 16–17: "*Lavacrum illud obsignatio est fidei, quae fides a paenitentiae fide incipitur et commendatur. Non ideo abluimur ut delinquere desinamus sed quia desiimus, quoniam iam corde loti sumus: haec enim prima audientis intinctio est*" and 6, 20: "*Itaque audientes optare intinctionem, non praesumere oportet*" (Borleffs, CCL 1 (1954), 331–332). The need for progression within the catechumenate is highlighted as a goal of Tertullian's works at the beginning of *De baptismo* 1, 1 and *De spectaculis* 1, 1.

10 Tertullian, *De idololatria* 24, 3 (on idolatry), also 11, 6 and 19, 1; *De spectaculis* 4, 1 (idolatry and shows); *De corona* 11 (soldiers). At the same time he also speaks against Marcionites imposing celibacy and chastity on catechumens, see *Contra Marcion* IV, 11.

11 Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 6, 3: "*Certi enim indubitatae veniae delictorum medium tempus interim furantur et com meatum sibi faciunt delinquendi quam eruditionem non delinquendi*"; 6, 14 "*Nemo ergo sibi aduleatur quia inter auditorum tirocinia deputatur, quasi eo etiam nunc sibi delinquere liceat*"; 6, 15: "*An alius est intictis christus, alius audientibus?*" (Borleffs, CCL 1 (1954), 330–331).

12 Cyprian, *Ep.* 73, 22.1–2 (in the context of the controversy over rebaptism): "[...] *catecuminos nobis opponunt, si quis ex his antequam in ecclesia baptizetur in confessione nominis adprehensus fuerit et occisus, an spem salutis et praemium confessionis amittat, eo quod ex aqua prius non sit renatus. Sciant igitur eiusmodi homines, suffragatores et fautores haereticorum, catecuminos illos primo integram fidem et ecclesiae veritatem tenere et ad debellandum diabolium de divinis castris cum plena et sincera dei patris et Christi et spiritus sancti cognitione procedere, deinde nec privari baptismi sacramento, utpote qui baptizen-*

ates for the practice of emergency baptism in the case of dying babies and adult catechumens who cannot be properly initiated. Similarly, he acknowledges—in the footsteps of Tertullian—the baptism of blood for martyred catechumens, that is the idea that their martyrdom replaces baptism.<sup>13</sup> Besides Tertullian and Cyprian, in third-century Africa, *catechumeni* are also found—without details about religious practices—in the famous martyrdom account of Perpetua and Felicitas. The main protagonist Perpetua and other characters are still catechumens when they are arrested and manage to be baptised before their martyrdom.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Pontius' life of Cyprian records the martyrdom of catechumens alongside Cyprian, and refers to the protagonist's virtuous youth as a catechumen.<sup>15</sup> Despite its allusive and fragmentary character, this late second- to third-century African evidence makes clear that catechumens were already a significant group within Christian communities, even sharing their fate in the great persecutions. At the same time, the catechumens' status of hearers meant that they had only a partial access to the core teachings, rituals and expectations for the afterlife that were restricted to the community of the baptised. Thus, the initiation process was not only designed to control the integration of new recruits, but also to lead them to seek closer association with the community.

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*tur gloriosissimo et maximo sanguinis baptismo, de quo et dominus dicebat habere se aliud baptisma baptizari.*" (Diercks, *CCSL* 3B / C (1994–1996), 556); *Ad Quirinum* 111, 98 (as part of a biblical compendium outlining essential teaching): "*Catecuminum peccare iam non debere. In epistulis Pauli ad Romanos: faciamus mala, dum veniunt bona: quorum condemnatio iusta est (Rm 8, 3)*" (Weber, R., *CCSL* 3 (1972), 170); *Ep.* 29, 2 (*doctores audientium*). For the exorcism: *Ep.* 69, 15.2 and *Sententiae Episcoporum LXXXVII de haereticis baptizandis* 37 (an account of the council of Carthage over rebaptism held in 256; the passage is later quoted by Augustine, *Bapt.* VI, 44.86). For mentions of *audientes* see also the third-century Pseudo-Cyprian, *De rebaptismo* 11–14.

- 13 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50, 15. For Cyprian see for instance *Ep.* 64, 5–6 (infant baptism); *Ep.* 18, 2 (emergency baptism of hearers); *Ep.* 73, 22.1–2 (baptism of blood, see above).
- 14 *Passio Perpetuae* 2, 1: "*Apprehensi sunt adolescentes catechumeni [...] inter hos et Vibia Perpetua [...] habens patrem et matrem et fratres duos, alterum aequae catechumenum*"; 20, 8: "*Illic Perpetua a quodam tunc catechumeno, Rustico nomine, qui ei adhaerebat, suscepta*"; 20, 10: "*Exinde accessitum fratrem suum, et illum catechumenum*" (Amat, *SC* 417 (1996), 104 and 174). This does not necessarily mean that they were recent converts and uninstructed about Christianity, see Boeft, J. den, Bremmer, J.N., (2010), 'Notiunculae Martyrologicae VI. Passio Perpetuae 2, 16 and 17', in Leemans, J., (ed.), (2010), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity. Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (Leuven), 47–63; DeVore, M., (2017), 'Catechumeni, Not 'New Converts': Revisiting the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*', *SP* 91, 237–247.
- 15 Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 1.2: "*Certe durum erat, ut cum maiores nostri plebeis et catechuminis martyrium consecutis tantum honoris pro martyrii ipsius veneratione debuerint*" and 6.4: "*Quid autem circa pauperes episcopus faceret, quos catechuminus diligebat?*" (Bastiaensen, A.A.R., (1975), *Vite dei santi* 111 (Rome), 4 and 18).



Catechumens who were ready to be baptised, often many years later, entered a phase of more immediate preparation for baptism, generally over several weeks. Besides the few early references discussed above, the ritual and catechetical preparation leading to baptism is better known from the fourth century onwards, at a period when this organisation seems to have particularly developed. It was organised to convey the sense of a radical change: in the West, catechumens received a new name, *competentes/electi*, and entered a specific ritual and catechetical preparation which included fasting, vigils, exorcisms, penance, regular examination and religious teaching, all meant to deeply transform them as they experienced the great cleansing of all past sins and a “new birth” into full Christian membership.<sup>16</sup> Baptism was the outcome of this complete transformation of the self, bringing individuals to a new belonging within the group of the baptised Christians, the *fideles*, closely bound together by this sacramental initiation and their common celebration of the Christian mysteries.<sup>17</sup>

## 1 Conversion, Christianisation and the Catechumenate

Thus, catechumens were at the crossroads between potential converts and baptised Christians. I argue in this book that they provide a key to understand concretely how Christian membership was gradually acquired by individuals and experienced at the communal level.<sup>18</sup> In a context of divisions within Christianity, particularly in Africa, this slow integration offered a way for churches to monitor the process of acquiring membership and for converts to familiarise themselves with Christianity and develop a sense of belonging. As a result,

16 Both *competens* and *electus* are used to describe the candidates for baptism in Latin sources, although Augustine never uses *electus* probably because it was also used by Manichaeans (on this see Chapter 1, p. 60). Besides Augustine, *competens* is found for instance, among others, in Chromatius of Aquileia, *S.* 18, l. 168; Egeria, *Itinerarium* 45; Zeno of Verona, *S.* 1, 6; 11, 11; 11, 13.

17 This summary only presents broad features, for more details on the rites see for instance studies in note 39.

18 I use ‘membership’ to refer to one’s status as members of the community: I therefore speak of the membership of catechumens as Christians. I find this term appropriate because it is neutral and close to early Christian sources, recalling the *membra Christi* mentioned in Paul (1 Cor 6, 15). I employ the term ‘belonging’ to refer to the individual and collective sense of being part of a Christian community. Identity is a concept that has grown particularly familiar in modern scholarship (see note 22); because of its manifold possible meanings, I generally refrain from using it for late antique sources, but I refer to it in link to modern scholarship.

however, the community was divided into two main groups based on ritual progression. This left catechumens at the threshold of Christianity, both in terms of ritual practices and of their commitment to shared rules of conduct. For Christian communities, bringing new recruits to closer integration was a decisive opportunity for self-fashioning but also a significant challenge. Nuancing the notion of a unified or static Christian identity, the study of the catechumenate sheds light on the complex nature of religious belonging. This book therefore contends that the catechumenate has a substantial contribution to make to the broader study of conversion and Christianisation in the Roman and post-Roman world.

Against a straightforward narrative of triumph, the expansion of Christianity in the post-Constantinian era has brought scholars to explore conversion narratives and the Christianisation of the Roman world, assessing the degree to which conversion was achieved, for instance, in the transformation of society, particularly the state and the aristocracy, and through the interactions between pagans and Christians.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on Markus' innovative per-

- 19 Nock, A.D., (1933), *Conversion, the Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford) is a paradigmatic but now criticised study emphasising the radical and immediate nature of conversion. Recent scholarship rather considers conversion as a complex process, see Finn, Th., (1997a), *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York); Kreider, A., (1999), *Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg); Kreider, A., (ed.), (2001), *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh); Mills, K., Grafton, A., (eds.), (2003), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Seeing and Believing* (Rochester NY); Crook, Z.A., (2004), *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin-New York); Perrin, M.-Y., (2007), 'De quelques homologues entre ralliements confessionnels en régime chrétien et adhésions au christianisme dans l'antiquité tardive', *Mediterranea* 4, 263–280; Papaconstantinou, A., McLynn, N., Schwartz, D., (eds.), (2015), *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam and Beyond* (Farnham). For the spread of Christianity, see a recent overview of scholarship in Maxwell, J., (2012), 'Paganism and Christianization', in Johnson, S., (ed.), (2012), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford), 849–875. See as well Brown, P., (1998), 'Christianization and Religious Conflict' in Cameron, A., Garnsey, P., (eds.), (1998), *Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 13: The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge), 632–664; Inglebert, H., Destephen, S., Dumézil, B., (eds.), (2010), *Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique* (Paris); Brown, P., (2013), *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 10th anniversary revised edition (Hoboken NJ). For a good overview of historiography in the field of relations between pagans and Christians, see: Brown, P., Lizzi Testa, R., (eds.), (2011), *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue (IVth–VIth Century A.D.)*, *Proceedings of the International Conference at the Monastery of Bose (October 2008)* (Zürich-Berlin). In a recent synthesis, Kreider develops the idea that the expansion of Christianity was driven by the example of the baptised and that catechesis on behaviour played a crucial role (Kreider, A., (2016), *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Chris-*

spective in his book *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Brown noted that “a history of Christianisation in Late Antiquity and in the Early Middle Ages must begin with close attention to what Christians themselves considered to be ‘Christianisation’”.<sup>20</sup> Recent scholarship has followed this thread, particularly focusing on how Christians asserted their identity in contradistinction to other religions. Markus explored the Christians’ self-definition, arguing that in Late Antiquity clerics developed a dichotomy between the sacred and the worldly to affirm a particular identity in a changing world.<sup>21</sup> Recent scholarship has grown even more suspicious of sources that were written precisely at a time when attempts were made to develop a clear-cut Christian identity.<sup>22</sup> Maxwell recently summarised these issues: “The grey area is often missing from studies of religion in Late Antiquity: most people were neither strict Christians nor devoted pagans.”<sup>23</sup>

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*tianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids MI), 133–184). Kreider gives important insights into the significance of pre-baptismal initiation and sponsorship for the process of Christianisation that match the broader aims of this book. However, the study focuses on the earliest sources from the third century, particularly the *Apostolic Tradition*, and does not take enough account of their idealised and normative character and the specific context of composition.

- 20 Brown, P., (1995), *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge), 16.
- 21 Markus, R., (1990), *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge), 1–17; on the ‘crisis of identity’ of Christians during the period and attempts to address it: 21–83.
- 22 Besides Rebillard’s recent studies (see note 24), see the surveys of Jacobs, A.S., (2008) ‘Jews and Christians’ and Salzman, M.R., (2008), ‘Pagans and Christians’, in Harvey, S.B., Hunter, D.G., (eds.), (2008), *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 169–185 and 186–202. For an inquiry into how Christians reflected in the West on the identity of the ‘average Christian’ in the fourth and fifth centuries see Piepenbrink, K., (2005), *Christliche Identität und Assimilation in der Spätantike: Probleme des Christseins in der Reflexion der Zeitgenossen* (Frankfurt am Main). A recent collection of papers also offers good overviews on conversion in link to the initiation process and identity formation: Bøgh, B.S., (ed.), (2014a), *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity* (Frankfurt am Main), in particular Bøgh, B.S., (2014b), ‘Introduction’, at 9–23 and Jacobsen, A.-C., (2014), ‘Identity Formation through Catechetical Teaching in Early Christianity’, at 203–223 which provides further bibliography on the problematic uses of the concept of identity.
- 23 Maxwell (2012), 866. Similarly, on the strong opposition drawn between pagans and Christians as a construct see Kahlos, M., (2007), *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures, c. 360–430* (Aldershot). Kahlos has coined the term ‘*incerti*’ (see Ibid. 30–34) to try to characterise these individuals who are neither hard-line pagans nor hard-line Christians. Taking a different approach, Jones, P., (2014), *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge MA) explores commonalities and differences between pagans and Christians, and how “pagans” were constructed in Christian discourse. More recently, on the late antique religious categories of pagans, Jews and Christians as a construct, see Massa, F., (2017), ‘Nommer et classer les religions aux II<sup>e</sup>–IV<sup>e</sup> siècles: la taxinomie “paganisme, juda-

Most recently, offering a model to explore this grey area in late antique Africa in particular, Rebillard has criticised the idea of an overarching Christian identity and argued that Christians displayed multiple identities following a “lateral arrangement of membership sets”, religion constituting only one of them and not necessarily the most significant. Although clerics like Augustine precisely attempted to enforce a “hierarchical arrangement”, individuals did not see their Christian identity as exclusive as early Christian writers would have liked.<sup>24</sup> The approaches developed by Markus and Rebillard open new ground for the study of Christianisation by investigating how clerics, often facing resistance, attempted to develop a cohesive Christian identity.

Building on these insights, rather than focusing on the dichotomy pagan/Christian, this book aims to explore further how Christians themselves defined and experienced their own religious belonging. Belonging was first and foremost acquired and defined, I argue, in the framework of the catechumenate. Studying this process of initiation and integration enables us to see from within how Christians negotiated religious membership and thus leads us to a more detailed understanding of Christianity in Late Antiquity.

This investigation focuses on late antique North Africa, from the fourth to the early sixth century, exploring the peculiar organisation of the catechumenate and the category of catechumens, their practices and their role in shaping Christian communities. The extensive writings of Augustine of Hippo are the most abundant source about the catechumenate in Early Christianity, while rare early contemporary evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries—canons of councils, sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus and anonymous sermons—and letters of Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe from the early sixth century provide a significant opportunity to study the history of the catechumenate on a longer chronological span. Sources before the fourth century are particularly scarce. In the Western part of the Mediterranean, as we have seen, the earliest but small amount of allusive sources originates from Africa, in the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian. These sources, although useful to trace back the early stages of its history, only provide a narrow glimpse into the com-

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isme, christianisme”, *RHR* 4, 689–715 (within a broader volume dedicated to discourse on religions in the Roman Empire).

24 Rebillard, E., (2015), ‘Late Antique Limits of Christianness: North Africa in the Age of Augustine’, in Rebillard, E., Rüpke, J., (eds.), (2015), *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Washington DC), 293–318, at 300. See also Rebillard, E., (2012b), ‘Religious Sociology. Being Christian in the Time of Augustine’, in Vessey, M., (ed.), (2012), *A Companion to Augustine* (Chichester), 40–53. Rebillard, E., (2012a), *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 C.E.* (Ithaca NY) provides a broader study, the introduction giving a good overview of the field.

plexity of the catechumenate. It is only with the fourth century, and mainly with Augustine's writings, that it becomes possible to study the catechumenate in more detail. Moreover, as I will show, most studies have focused on the earliest evidence before the fourth century, investigated a single author, or offered syntheses across regions with a particular concentration on the best documented period between c. 350 and 450. Detailed regional studies over a longer chronology are thus essential to renew our understanding of the catechumenate. This book therefore concentrates on Africa starting from the mid-fourth century to highlight local diversity, make best use of Augustine's abundant evidence, trace the evolution of the catechumenate until the sixth century, and follow the early reception of Augustine's writings on the catechumenate that became particularly influential in the Middle Ages until modern times.

## 2 The Catechumenate and Historical Research

The catechumenate has been a widely neglected topic in historical research. This may be due to the relatively scarce amount of available evidence on this aspect and its often allusive or interpretatively complex character,<sup>25</sup> and to the fact that the study of the catechumenate has perhaps been seen as a topic only relevant for theological and liturgical studies. Most existing research has been carried out by liturgists and theologians investigating the history, theology and liturgy of baptism and Christian initiation more generally. Although a full overview of the evolution of scholarly work on the catechumenate since modern times would require a separate enquiry, key developments can be summarised as follows. Before the nineteenth century, a number of studies attempting to provide systematic syntheses of the rites and practices of the early Church included learned discussions on the ancient catechumenate in general, for instance the influential works of Martène and Bingham.<sup>26</sup> Later, the

25 The statement of Robert Taft on the evidence in the East during Byzantine times is in many ways also true for the West: 'Though confusion is by no means a rarity in Byzantine documentation, the evidence for the catechumenate takes the prize: the only thing clear in it is its lack of clarity' (Taft, R., F., (2009), 'When did the Catechumenate Die Out in Constantinople?', in Alchermes, J.D., Evans, H.C., and Thelma, K.Th., (eds.), (2009), *Anathemata Eortika. Studies in Honor of Thomas F. Mathews* (Mainz), 288–295, at 294).

26 Martène, E., (1700), *De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus libri quatuor* (Rouen), esp. 1–162; Bingham, J., (1840), *Origines Ecclesiasticae; or, the Antiquities of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, book 10: 'Of the institution of the catechumens, and the first use of the creeds of the Church' and book 11: 'Of the rites and customs observed in the administration of baptism in the primitive Church' (London, 1840), 256–395 and 396–607 (first edition London, 1711). See as well

catechumenate attracted growing interest from liturgists and pastoral theologians, aiming at reconstructing the process of initiation in the early Church and in particular at gathering material to defend or reform catechism and religious instruction. Such scholarship started particularly developing in the second half of the nineteenth century in Germany, following the rise of practical theology,<sup>27</sup> gaining further prominence in the twentieth century as part of an effort to produce summaries and manuals on the Early Church and its liturgy.<sup>28</sup> A particular

the already mentioned investigation of de l'Aubespine (1623). An exploration of scholarship before 1700 is outside the scope of this short synthesis; however, Bingham's study contains detailed notes that provide a good starting point.

- 27 See Palmer, Ch.D.F. von, (1857), 'Katechese, Katechetik, Katechumenen', *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* 7, 441–454; Höfling, J.W.F., (1859) *Das Sakrament der Taufe nebst den anderen damit zusammenhängenden Akten der Initiation* (Erlangen), first edition 1846; Zezschwitz, C.A.G. von, (1863), *System der kirchlichen Katechetik*, volume 1: *Der Katechumenat oder die kirchliche Erziehung nach Theorie und Geschichte: ein Handbuch namentlich für Seelsorger und Pädagogen* (Leipzig); Mayer, J., (1868), *Geschichte des Katechumenats und der Katechese in den ersten sechs Jahrhunderten* (Kempten); Weiss, A.G., (1869), *Die altkirchliche Pädagogik dargestellt in Katechumenat und Katechese der ersten sechs Jahrhunderte* (Freiburg); Probst, F., (1884), *Katechese und Predigt vom Anfang des vierten bis zum Ende des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (Breslau); Funk, F.X., (1886), 'Die Katechumenatsklassen und Bußstationen im christlichen Alterthum', *ThQ* 68, 356–390; Kraus, F.X., (1886), 'Katechumenen', *Real-Encyklopädie der christlichen Alterthümer* 2, 147–152; Weiss, A.G., (1886), 'Katechetenamt', 'Katechetischer Unterricht', *ibid.*, 136–138, 138–147; Holtzmann, H.J., (1892), 'Die Katechese der alten Kirche', in Harnack, A. von, Schurer, E., Holtzmann, H.J., et al. (1892), *Theologische Abhandlungen Carl von Weizsäcker, zu seinem Geburtstage 11. Dezember 1892* (Freiburg), 61–110; Funk, F.X., (1897), 'Die Katechumenatsklassen des christlichen Altertums', *Kirchengeschichtliche Abhandlungen und Untersuchungen* 1, 182–209; Wiegand, F., (1899), *Die Stellung des Apostolischen Symbols im kirchlichen Leben des Mittelalters*. 1. (einziger) Teil, *Symbol und Katechumenat* (Leipzig); Eggersdorfer, F.X., (1907), *Der heilige Augustinus als Pädagoge und seine Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Bildung* (Freiburg), esp. 153–200. On this scholarship mostly focusing on the catechumenate as a teaching process see Bizer, Ch., (1989), 'Katechetik', *Theologische Realencyclopädie* 18, 686–710. Outside Germany see the syntheses of Hagerup, H.H., (1844) *De catechumenis ecclesiae Africanae* (Copenhagen) and Corblet, J., (1881), 'Du catéchuménat, esquisse historique', *Revue de l'art chrétien* 25, 5–38.
- 28 See Dölger, F.J., (1909), *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual* (Paderborn); Bareille, G., (1910), 'Catéchèse', 'Catéchuménat', *DTC* 2.2, 1877–1965 and 1968–1987; Schwartz, E., (1911), *Bußstufen und Katechumenatsklassen* (Strasbourg), reprinted in Id., (1963), *Gesammelte Schriften. Fünfter Band: Zum neuen Testament und frühen Christentum* (Berlin), 274–362; Duchesne, L., (1925), *Origines du culte chrétien*, 5th edition (Paris), 309–360 (first edition 1889); Leclercq, H., (1925), 'Catéchèse-Catéchisme-Catéchumène', in *DACL* 2.2, 2530–2579; Puniet, P. de, (1925), 'Catéchuménat', *DACL* 2.2, 2579–2621; Dondeyne, A., (1932), 'La discipline des scrutins dans l'Église latine avant Charlemagne', *RHE* 28, 5–33 and 751–787; Lebreton, J., (1934), 'Le développement des institutions ecclésiastiques à la fin du second siècle et au début du troisième', *RSR* 24, 129–164 at 129–137; Capelle, B., (1933a),

trend of scholarship within this development, and only partially related to the catechumenate, has been the study of early Christian creeds, gathering and examining their variant forms, history and legacy.<sup>29</sup>

These studies anticipate a particularly important trend for the study of the catechumenate that relates to the preparation, convalidation and completion of liturgical reforms in modern churches in the West, and most prominently, in the Catholic Church with the Second Vatican council (1962–1965). In the course of the twentieth century, particularly in Western Europe, Christian communities were faced with increasing dechristianisation of society, as baptism and more broadly participation in liturgy gradually decreased, leading them to operate in a new missionary situation. The generalised practice of infant baptism and its organisation, which prevailed even for exceptional adult baptisms since the Middle Ages, with a reduced preparation concentrating on the role of sponsors and a theoretical catechism, seemed not, therefore, to match the new needs of the time. In reaction to this new context, the Second Vatican council aimed at proposing a new ecclesiology, for which the restored catechumenate, with its structured period of preparation intended for new adult converts, would become of major importance. This new development—despite its limited success in churches—explains that several studies were conducted on the

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'L'introduction du catéchuménat à Rome', *RecTh* 5, 129–154; Borella, P., (1939), 'La "missa" o "dimissio catechumenorum" nelle liturgie occidentali', *EphLit* 53, 60–110; Folkemer, L.D., (1946a), 'A Study of the Catechumenate', *ChHist* 15, 286–307; Monachino, V., (1947), *La cura pastorale a Milano, Cartagine e Roma nel sec. IV* (Rome); Chavassee, A., (1948a), 'Les deux rituels romain et gaulois de l'admission au catéchuménat que renferme le Sacramentaire Gélasiens (Vat. Reg. 316)', in *Études de critique et d'histoire religieuse*, vol. offert à Léon Vaganay (Lyon), 79–98; Chavassee, A., (1948b), 'Le carême romain et les scrutins pré-baptismaux avant le IX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RecSR* 35, 325–381; Botte, B., (1957), 'Competentes', *RAC* 3, 266–268; Chavassee, A. (1960), 'La discipline romaine des sept scrutins prébaptismaux', *RecSR* 48, 227–240.

29 See in particular Hahn, A., (1897), *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, 3rd edition (Breslau), first edition 1842; Caspari, C.P., (1866, 1869, 1875), *Unge-druckte, unbeachtete und wenig beachtete Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel*, 3 volumes (Christiania); Kattenbusch, F., (1894), *Das apostolische Symbol*, volume 1: *Die Grundgestalt des Taufsymbols* (Leipzig); Kattenbusch, F., (1900), *Das apostolische Symbol*, volume 2: *Verbreitung und Bedeutung des Taufsymbols* (Leipzig), both reprinted 1962. This early scholarship has been carried on and expanded in more recent times, see Kelly, J.N.D., (1972), *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edition (London), first edition 1950; Westra, L.H., (2002), *The Apostles' Creed: Origin, History, and some Early Commentaries* (Turnhout); Keefe, S., (2012), *A Catalogue of Works Pertaining to the Explanation of the Creed in Carolingian Manuscripts* (Turnhout); Kinzig, W., (2017a), *Faith in Formulae: a Collection of Early Christian Creeds and Creed-related Texts*, 4 volumes (Oxford); Kinzig, W., (2017b), *Neue Texte und Studien zu den antiken und frühmittelalterlichen Glaubensbekenntnissen* (Berlin).

catechumenate and baptism in the first centuries to bring a distant practice back to life. Church Fathers, who have long been entrusted with a significant authority within Christianity, and who lived in a society that was still largely unchristian, seemed to provide a powerful guide to give new life to the process of conversion and Christianisation. The discussions before, during and after the council and more broadly the gradual implementation of reforms in churches around the globe in reaction to dechristianisation led to the publication of numerous studies aiming at recovering the practices of the early Church for guidance in modern pastoral work, particularly in Western Europe from the late 1950s until today.<sup>30</sup> Studies concentrated on the origins of practices, on the “patristic age” between c. 350 and 450, or on single authors to draw wide syntheses aiming at reconstructing the ancient practice of the Early Church for use in modern times.<sup>31</sup>

30 For an overview of these pastoral reforms and the scholars' perspective: see Yarnold, E.J., (1999), “The Catechumenate for Adults Is To Be Restored”. Patristic Adaptation in the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults, in Swanson, R.N., (ed.), (1999), *Continuity and Change in Christian Worship. Papers Read at the 1997 Summer Meeting and the 1998 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Woodbridge-Rochester NY), 478–494.

31 Origins: Turck, A., (1964), ‘Aux origines du catéchuménat’, *RSPH* 42, 20–31. ‘Patristic age’: Groppo, G., (1979), ‘L'evoluzione del catecumenato nella Chiesa antica dal punto di vista pastorale’, *Salesianum* 41, 235–255; Yarnold, E.J., (1992), ‘II. Initiation. The Fourth and Fifth Centuries’, in Jones, Ch., et al., (1992), *The Study of Liturgy*, revised edition (London), 129–144; Yarnold, E.J., (1994), *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation. The Origins of the RCIA*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh); Pasquato, O., (2006), ‘Catechesi’, ‘Catecumenato/Discopolato’, *Nuovo dizionario patristico di antichità cristiane* 1 (2006), 902–960. Focus on specific patristic authors: Finn, Th., (1967), *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom* (Washington DC); Riley, H.M., (1974), *Christian Initiation: a Comparative Study in the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington DC); Satterlee, C.A., (2002), *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville MN); Max, M. (2008), *Die Weitergabe des Glaubens in der Liturgie: Eine historisch-theologische Untersuchung zu den Übergaberiten des Katechumenats* (Regensburg); Harmless (2014). Broader syntheses embracing Roman sources from the Early Middle Ages: Maertens, Th., (1962), *Histoire et pastorale du rituel du catéchuménat et du baptême* (Bruges); Fisher, J.D.C., (2004), *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West. A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of Initiation*, 2nd edition (London), first edition 1965; Kretschmar, G., (1970), ‘Die Geschichte des Taufgottesdienstes in der alten Kirche’, *Leiturgia* 5, 1–348; Willis, G.G., (1994), *A History of Early Roman Liturgy to the Death of Pope Gregory the Great* (London), 116–136; Heid, S., (2013), ‘Entweltlichung—Verchristlichung: Die Taufe in der Kirche Roms bis zum frühen Mittelalter’, in Hofmann, P., Becker, K.M., Eberle, J., (eds.), (2013), *Taufberufung und Weltverantwortung. 50 Jahre Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil* (Paderborn), 137–150.



The important studies of Stenzel on baptism (1958) and of Dujarier on sponsorship and the catechumenate (1962) are good examples of such scholarship proposing synthetic views of the main authoritative sources. While Stenzel offered a broad overview of how the rites of baptism developed since the origins until the sixth century following a “genetic approach”, Dujarier focused on sources before 313AD that would reflect the “original” catechumenate, in particular the now controversial *Apostolic Tradition*.<sup>32</sup> In the hypothetically reconstructed Greek version published by Botte, the *Apostolic Tradition* provided essential evidence about the catechumenate for these influential studies.<sup>33</sup> It distinguishes between the two phases of the catechumenate—the time spent as catechumens and the more specific baptismal preparation—, recommends a length of three years for the first phase, and points to pre-baptismal teaching and examination procedures for the admission of new catechumens and of candidates for baptism, with rules of behaviour requiring candidates to abandon unlawful professions. Moreover, it refers to the dismissal of catechumens, the baptism of blood, and, for the baptismal preparation, to rituals of exorcism, the imposition of hands, fasting and a ritual bath on Thursday preceding baptism at Easter.<sup>34</sup> This source attracted particular attention because it corroborated the earliest African evidence provided by Tertullian and Cyprian, and was thought to have been composed in third-century Rome, at the heart of what would become Western Christianity. Moreover, its both detailed and idealised character, aiming at setting a normative procedure of initiation, matched the aims of studies published in the context of church reforms. The objective of such scholarship was to address modern pastoral concerns and provide a standardised view of the ancient catechumenate that would pertain to all regions and every Christian community.

In more recent times, however, liturgists have developed new insights into early Christian sources and on the regional variety of liturgical practices, increasingly refraining from attempts to reconstruct a single and original pattern of initiation.<sup>35</sup> This new approach has been particularly applied to the

32 Stenzel, A., (1958), *Die Taufe: eine genetische Erklärung der Taufliturgie* (Innsbruck); Dujarier (1962a). Dujarier's approach is reflected in his later syntheses on the catechumenate: Dujarier, M., (1979), *A History of the Catechumenate. The First Six Centuries* (New York); Id., (1982), *Brève histoire du catéchuménat* (Abidjan); Id., (1983), *L'initiation chrétienne des adultes. Commentaire historique et pastoral du nouveau rituel* (Abidjan). In the same trend see the volume of *La Maison Dieu* in 1962 dedicated to Christian initiation.

33 See Botte, B., (ed.), (1989), *La Tradition Apostolique de saint Hippolyte: essai de reconstitution*, 5th edition (Münster).

34 *Apostolic Tradition* 15–21, 27.

35 For a particularly cogent overview and refutation of older scholarship see, Bradshaw, P.,

*Apostolic Tradition*, a work originating in Greek but preserved in several witnesses in Latin and other Eastern languages. New research has questioned the authorship, the early dating, and the hypothetical reconstruction of the lost Greek archetype by Botte, emphasising the great number of variants between extant versions.<sup>36</sup> Latest research, particularly the discovery of a new Ethiopian manuscript has progressively led to a reassessment of the issues at stake, showing in particular connections between the Latin and the Ethiopian version discovered.<sup>37</sup> While these insights have been applied in studies on the origins and developments of the rites and theology of baptism and Christian initiation in general, little attention has been devoted to the catechumenate however, particularly in the English-speaking world.<sup>38</sup>

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- (2002), *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd edition (New York). For overviews of trends in scholarship until the early 70s see Wainwright, G., (1974), 'The Rites and Ceremonies of Christian Initiation: Developments of the Past', *Studia Liturgica* 10, 2–24; Kretschmar, G., (1977), 'Recent research on Christian initiation', *Studia Liturgica* 12, 87–106. On more recent developments, notably highlighting the necessity to critically assess sources and take regional diversity more into account, following the seminal study of Bradshaw, see Spinks, B.D., (2012), 'What is "New" in the "History" of Christian Baptismal Liturgy: The Early Centuries', *Studia liturgica* 42, 16–32 focusing on Eastern material, and for the West: Larson-Miller, L., (2012), 'Baptism in the Early Medieval West. Our Changing Perspective of the "Dark Ages"', *Studia Liturgica* 42, 33–53.
- 36 Metzger, M., (1988), 'Nouvelles perspectives pour la prétendue *Tradition Apostolique*', *Ecclesia Orans* 5, 241–259; Metzger, M., (1992a), 'À propos des règlements ecclésiastiques et de la prétendue *Tradition Apostolique*', *RSR* 66, 249–261; Metzger, M., (1992b), 'Enquêtes autour de la prétendue *Tradition Apostolique*', *Ecclesia Orans* 9, 7–36; Bradshaw, P., (1996), 'Redating the Apostolic Tradition: Some Preliminary Steps', in Mitchell, N., Baldovin, J., (ed.), (1996), *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh* (Collegeville MN), 3–17; Id., (2001), 'The Problems of a New Edition of the Apostolic Tradition', in Taft, R.F., Winkler, G., (ed.), (2001), *Comparative Liturgy Fifty Years After Anton Baumstark (1872–1948): Acts of the International Congress: Rome, 25–29 September 1998* (Rome), 613–622; Metzger, M., (2001), 'Tradition orale et tradition écrite dans la pratique liturgique antique', *ibid.*, 599–611; Marksches, Ch., (2001), 'Neue Studien zur sogenannten *Traditio apostolica*', *ibid.*, 583–598. An English translation with a synoptic view of the texts is provided by Bradshaw, P., Johnson, M.E., and Edward Phillips, L., (2002), *The Apostolic Tradition. A Commentary* (Minneapolis).
- 37 Bausi, A., (2009), 'The "So-Called *Traditio apostolica*": Preliminary Observations on the New Ethiopic Evidence', in Grieser, H., Merkt, A., (eds.), (2009), *Volks Glaube im antiken Christentum* (Darmstadt), 291–321; Bausi, A., (2011), 'La nuova versione etiopica della *Traditio Apostolica*: edizione e traduzione preliminare', in Buzi, P., Camplani, A., (eds.), (2011), *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual Trends. Studies in Honor of Tito Orlandi* (Rome), 19–69. For a recent overview of scholarship: Meßner, R., (2016), 'Die angebliche *Traditio Apostolica*. Eine neue Textpräsentation', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 58, 1–58.
- 38 These studies are more attentive to regional diversity but explore baptism and Christian

More broadly, even in recent scholarship dealing with fourth and fifth-century sources for the catechumenate and taking regional diversity into account, research has specifically concentrated on the intensive ritual preparation preceding baptism during Lent,<sup>39</sup> and on the teaching dimension of the initiation.<sup>40</sup> In fact, fourth and fifth-century sources include abundant baptismal catecheses from important figures like Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Quodvultdeus of Carthage, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, while Egeria's *Itinerarium* provides a unique account of the bap-

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initiation in general rather than the catechumenate: Saxer (1988); Johnson, M.E., (2007), *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Collegeville MN); Johnson, M.E., (2008), 'Christian initiation', in Harvey-Hunter (2008), 693–710; Ferguson, E., (2009), *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids MI); Gellholm, D., Vegge, T., Norderval, O., (eds.), (2011), *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Berlin); Bradshaw, P., (2019), 'Christian Initiation', in Uro, R., Day, J.J., Roitto, R., DeMaris, R.E., (eds.), (2019), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual* (Oxford), 523–537. Bradshaw, P., (2009), *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London) is a noteworthy exception as it includes (at 55–68) a study on catechumens and the prohibition to hear the Gospel in the first centuries. Gavrilyuk, P.L., (2007), *Histoire du catéchuménat dans l'Église ancienne* (Paris) explores the catechumenate regionally over a long chronology, however it mostly focuses on catechesis: for this trend see note 40. Ferguson, E., (ed.), (1993), *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church* (New York-London) assembles previously published papers on conversion, Christianisation and Christian initiation. On pre-baptismal scrutinies, in connection to the modern reforms of rituals, see Serra, D.E., (1978), *The Scrutinies of Elect in the Church at Rome* (University of Notre Dame, PhD Thesis); Mann, P.M., (2011), *How Rituals Form and Transform: The Scrutiny Rite from Medieval to Modern Times* (Catholic University of America, Washington DC, PhD Thesis). Recent regional studies on baptism have been carried out for Spain: McConnell, Ch.D., (2005), *Baptism in Visigothic Spain: Origins, Development and Interpretation* (University of Notre Dame, PhD Thesis); Beitia, Ph., (2010), *Le baptême et l'initiation chrétienne en Espagne du III<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris); McConnell mostly focuses on baptismal rites while Beitia does little beyond listing available evidence.

39 For wide critical summaries: Cavallotto, G., (1996), *Catecumenato antico. Diventare cristiani secondo i padri* (Bologna); Metzger, M., Drews, W., Brakmann, H., (2004), 'Katechumenat', *RAC* 20, 497–574. The focus on the baptismal preparation also largely applies to the studies cited in notes 31 and 38.

40 Ferguson, E., (2001), 'Catechesis and Initiation', in Kreider (2001), 229–268; Satterlee (2002); Colish, M.L., (2005), *Ambrose's patriarchs. Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame IN); Gavrilyuk (2007); Finn, Th., (2013), 'Catechesis, Catechumenate, Early Church', in Bagnall, R.S., et al., (eds.), (2013), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (Malden MA), 1368–1370; Harmless (2014); Vopřada, D., (2020), *Quodvultdeus: A Bishop Forming Christians in Vandal Africa* (Leiden-Boston). A similar focus on the catechumenate as "catechesis" and a "curriculum" is adopted in Schwartz, D.L., (2013), *Paideia and Cult: Christian Initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington DC), 2. This, in a way, perpetuates the German tradition presented in note 27.

tismal preparation.<sup>41</sup> Scholars like Saxer have therefore given great weight to fourth- and fifth-century sources while dismissing the later evolution as a progressive ritualistic decay of the early Church discipline with the generalisation of infant baptism.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the study of the *Apostolic Tradition*, an ideal and normative source, has led scholars, particularly Dujarier, to suppose that while in the third century there was a well-organised and rigorous integration of catechumens lasting three years prior to the request for baptism or less for exceptionally zealous catechumens, and a designed period of instruction, any strict regulation and framework designed for them disappeared in the fourth century, with the decay of the catechumenate and the widespread postponement of baptism.<sup>43</sup> As a consequence, little is known about the practices and status of catechumens before entering the baptismal preparation and the evolution of the catechumenate more generally beyond the Patristic period.

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- 41 On pre-baptismal catechesis, besides the studies quoted in note 40 see in particular: Rochat, L.-L., (1875), *Le catéchuménat au IV<sup>ème</sup> siècle d'après les catéchèses de S<sup>t</sup> Cyrille de Jérusalem* (Geneva); Touton, G., (1951), 'La méthode catéchétique de St Cyrille de Jérusalem comparée à celles de St Augustin et de Théodore de Mopsueste', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 1, 265–285; Daniélou, H., Charlat, R. du, (1968), *La catéchèse aux premiers siècles* (Paris); Saldarini, G., (1970), 'La catechesi nella tradizione patristica', *Sacra Dottrina* 15, 49–75; Riley (1974); Janeras, S., (1976), 'Sobre el cicle de predicació de les antigues catequesis baptismals', *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 1, 159–182; Brock, S., (1980), 'Some Early Syriac Baptismal Commentaries', *OCP* 46 (1980), 209–261; Duval, Y.-M., (1985), 'L'Écriture au service de la catéchèse', in Fontaine, J., Pietri, Ch. (eds.), *Le monde antique et la Bible* (Paris), 262–288; Gerber, S., (2000), *Theodor von Mopsuestia und das Nicänum. Studien zu den katechetischen Homilien* (Leiden-Boston-Cologne), esp. 31–33; Brakmann, H., Pasquato, O., (2004), 'Katechese-Katechismus', *RAC* 20, 422–496; Pasquato (2006), 902–933; Lorgeoux, O., (2018), 'Cyril of Jerusalem as Catechetical Teacher. Religious Education in Fourth-Century Jerusalem', in Gemeinhardt, P., Lorgeoux, O., Munkhold Christensen, M.L., (eds.), (2018), *Teachers in Late Antique Christianity* (Tübingen), 76–91.
- 42 Saxer (1988), 590–591, 634–636; see as well, for example: Righetti, M., (1988), *Manuale di storia liturgica*, 2nd edition (Milan), II, 167 and 244–245; IV, 60–61 (on the catechumenate more broadly 51–94); Cavallo (1996), 209; Wahle, S., (2008), 'Gestalt und Deutung der christlichen Initiation im mittelalterlichen lateinischen Westen', in Leonhard, C., Olbrich, R., Lange, C., (eds.), (2008), *Die Taufe. Einführung in Geschichte und Praxis* (Darmstadt), 29–48, at 29. See Chapter 6, note 69 for such views about John's letter to Senarius.
- 43 For instance Dujarier (1979), 92–97; Dujarier (1982), 69–72. See as well Busch, B., (1938), 'De initiatione christiana secundum sanctum Augustinum', *EphLit* 52, 159–178 and 358–483, at 424; Jungmann, J.A., (1960), *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great* (London), 248–249; Maertens (1962), 116–120; Meer, F. van der, (1961), *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, translated by Brian Battershaw and George R. Lamb (London), 356–357; Lynch, J., (1986), *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton NJ), 94–95. These views are rightly rejected by Harmless (2014), 56 n. 74, 134 n. 8 and 182 n. 4 particularly on the basis of Bradshaw (2002).

The situation for the study of Africa corresponds to the wider trends in scholarship. Augustine's prominent position in the religious history of the West has led researchers to study, beyond the rites of admission into the catechumenate, the few available pre-baptismal catecheses and references to rites of preparation in detail.<sup>44</sup> Among them, the recent works of Brons and Harmless deserve to be briefly discussed in particular. Brons' work—which appeared as I was carrying the revisions to this book—takes the catechumenate as a case study to shed new light on Augustine's teaching on Trinity, and emphasises the close link between teaching and ritual, drawing on the perspectives of ritual studies.<sup>45</sup> It particularly provides overviews of the main rituals performed at the admission into the catechumenate and during the preparation for baptism, with analyses of the sermons on the creed and on the Lord's Prayer and attention to liturgical diversity.<sup>46</sup> In more than one instance, Brons' conclusions about the uncertainty of the ritual organisation of the Lenten preparation for baptism in Hippo match our own, as will be clear in Chapter 4. More broadly, however, Brons' study does not aim at providing a historical overview of the catechumenate and its meaning for Christian communities, but rather considers it as a window into Augustine's teaching on Trinity, thus relating to scholarship focusing on early Christian writers' theology through rituals. Harmless'

44 Major studies are Harmless (2014), 291–403 and Poque, S., SC 16 (1966), 9–153; Brons, M., (2017), *Augustins Trinitätslehre praktisch: Katechese, Liturgie, Predigt* (Tübingen); Voprada (2020), 106–126. See as well: Roetzer, W., (1930), *Des heiligen Augustinus Schriften als liturgie-geschichtliche Quelle. Eine liturgie-geschichtliche Studie* (Munich), 143–172; Busch (1938) with a good overview of earlier scholarship at 162–164 and some attention to regional diversity; Monachino (1947), 171–183; Audet, Th.-A., (1954), 'Note sur les catéchèses baptismales de S. Augustin', in *Augustinus Magister* (Paris), 1, 151–160; Eichenseer, C., (1960), *Das Symbolum Apostolicum beim heiligen Augustinus* (St Ottilien), 133–145; van der Meer (1961), 357–382; Latte, R. de, (1975), 'Saint Augustin et le baptême: étude liturgico-historique du rituel baptismal des adultes chez saint Augustin', *QL* 56, 177–223; Saxer (1988), 381–399; Finn, Th., (1990), 'It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, 589–616; Lamirande, E., (1992a), 'Catechumenus', *AL* 1, fasc. 5–6, 788–794; Grossi, V., (1993), *La catechesi battesimale agli inizi del v secolo. Le fonti agostiniane*, 2nd edition (Rome), 45–74; Rodomonti, A., (1995), 'Note al "sermo de symbolo ad Catechumenos" di S. Agostino', *Orpheus* 16, 127–139; Cavallotto (1996), 164–194; Gavrilyuk (2007), 297–318; Johnson (2007), 185–198; Max (2008), 27–49; Ferguson (2009), 776–816; Wills, G., (2012), *Font of Life* (Oxford), 137–171; Jensen, R.M., Patout Burns Jr., J., (eds.), (2015), *Christianity in Roman Africa. The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids MI-Cambridge), 204–220; Eguarte Bendímez, E.A., (2016), 'San Agustín y la iniciación cristiana', *Augustinus* 61/240–241, 54–110. I have not been able to see Abhilash, G., (2013), *Catechising Through Love: the Catechetical Contributions of St Augustine* (Bangalore).

45 Brons (2017), 9–21.

46 Brons (2017), 117–203 (chapter 6).

book, first published in 1995 and updated in 2014 shortly before the author's death, has been a particularly important study in the course of our own investigation.<sup>47</sup> It was published in the aftermath of the implementation of the new reforms on the catechumenate in the Catholic Church in the USA, thus as part of the broader trend in Catholic scholarship described above. More particularly, it reacted against the focus on the ritual dimension of the catechumenate that left pastors with little guidance when teaching catechumens.<sup>48</sup> In the revised edition, Harmless situated his work in the perspective of Catholic *ressourcement* and emphasised the need to “return to the sources” for the organisation of contemporary catechesis.<sup>49</sup> Taking into account new insights into the study of liturgy and recognising the impossibility of resurrecting ancient practice, Harmless’ book focused on Augustine with an “educator’s eye”, attempting to “reconstruct his working curriculum”, providing first and foremost an attentive study of Augustine’s catechesis.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, and because of its particular aims, as I will show, Harmless’ study did not fully exploit Augustine’s evidence about catechumens.

Fundamentally, the specific agendas and the questions addressed in this scholarship often impregnated by pastoral concerns, although extremely useful for the study of specific rites of the catechumenate and of the catechetical function of sermons, have only given a limited perspective. Scholarship has concentrated on the earliest or best evidence, particularly neglectful of sources beyond the “Fathers” from the fifth and sixth centuries. Moreover, little attention is paid to the peculiar category of the *catechumeni*, their status and significance in Christian communities. The catechumenate has not been considered as an alternative and peculiar way of being Christian which shaped the process of Christianisation. The lack of interest in catechumens to understand Christianisation results from the fact that baptism has generally been seen as the only normative marker of Christian membership.<sup>51</sup> As a result, early Chris-

47 Harmless (2014).

48 Ibid., 16–25.

49 Ibid., xxv. On *ressourcement* see the helpful notes in Ibid., 20–25. The re-founded catechumenate (RCIA) is centred on rites particularly because its main sources include the *Apostolic Tradition* and the “Gelasian” sacramentary in the manuscript *Vat. Reg.* 316, both almost completely silent about catechesis.

50 Ibid., 26–28.

51 Exceptions are: Lamirande, E., (1963), ‘La signification de *Christianus* dans la théologie de saint Augustin et la tradition ancienne’, *REAug* 9, 221–234 who particularly well highlights the difference between our modern understanding of Christian and the broader sense that it had at Augustine’s time and the ambiguities that it created; Kretschmar (1970), 66 who also underlines that the catechumenate is fundamentally a way of being Christian.

tianity has often been studied in a dialogue with modern assumptions, the catechumenate being considered as a temporary intensive preparation to baptism that declined in the fourth century when the “real” catechumenate was supposedly restricted to a few weeks before Lent. The status of catechumens in the fourth and fifth centuries is presented as that of nominal Christians, resulting from the failed attempts of ancient churches in implementing swift baptism. Evidence for emergency baptism, particularly funerary inscriptions, and for widespread postponing of baptism amongst fourth-century emperors, together with repeated calls by bishops against catechumens delaying baptism, have commonly been understood by scholars as a failure of the churches and have often been connected to the supposed evolution of Christianity in the post-Constantinian era.<sup>52</sup> The modern stereotype developed of masses of catechumens who would have nominally adhered to Christianity out of convenience, putting off baptism as long as possible, often until death.<sup>53</sup> This stereotype, however, has been recently rejected. Rebillard has offered an alternative solution to the evidence about postponement through the study of Augustine’s sermons. By emphasising that complaints about delaying baptism in Augustine relate to the specific liturgical context of calls to baptism at the beginning of Lent, Rebillard concluded that there was no widespread postponement of

52 It is significant for instance, as highlighted in a recent article, that the emperor Constantine is generally thought to have become a catechumen only shortly before death, although it is also plausible that he entered the catechumenate early, see Guichard, L., (2017), ‘Le catéchuménat de Constantin Ier’, *REA* 119/2, 609–636.

53 Besides studies in note 42, see: Büsching, A.F., (1747), *Dissertatio historico-ecclesiastica de procrastinatione baptismi apud veteres eiusque caussis* (Halle); Wiegand (1899), 122; Dölger, F.J., (1913a), ‘Die Taufe Konstantins und ihre Probleme’, in Dölger, F.J., (ed.), (1913b), *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit: gesammelte Studien. Festgabe zum Konstantins-Jubiläum 1913 und zum goldenen Priesterjubiläum von Mgr. Dr. A. De Waal* (Freiburg), 377–447; Monachino (1947), 33; Chavasse, A., (1951), ‘Histoire de l’initiation chrétienne des enfants, de l’Antiquité à nos jours’, *LMD* 28, 26–44; Mesot, J., (1958), *Die Heidenbekehrung bei Ambrosius von Mailand* (Schöneck-Beckenried), 74–89; Dujarier (1962a), 36–46; Dujarier, M., (1962b), ‘L’évolution de la pastorale catéchuménale aux six premiers siècles de l’Église’, *LMD* 71, 46–61; Kretschmar (1970), 147–148; Schmitz, J., (1975), *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand: eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Initiation und Messfeier während des Jahres zur Zeit des Bischofs Ambrosius* (Obit. 397) (Cologne), 30–34; Nagel, E., (1980), *Kindertaufe und Taufaufschub* (Frankfurt am Main), 109–119; Janssens, J., (1981), *Vita e morte del cristiano negli epistaffi di Roma anteriori al sec. VII* (Rome), 33; Saxer (1988), 424; Kleinheyer, B., (1989), *Sakramentliche Feiern 1* (Regensburg), 64–70; Grossi (1993), 17–18; Cavallotto (1996), 253–258; Brown (1998), 657–658; Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 518–519; Roten, Ph. de, (2005), *Baptême et mystagogie: enquête sur l’initiation chrétienne selon s. Jean Chrysostome* (Fribourg), 188; Pasquato (2006), 945–956; Gavrilyuk (2007), 288–289; Johnson (2007), 115–119. A good synthesis in Ferguson (2009), 617–626.

baptism by indifferent catechumens in the early Church. Rejecting these negative judgments, Rebillard went further to conclude that catechumens did not constitute a pastoral problem for Augustine.<sup>54</sup> Harmless followed this lead but remarked that Rebillard's conclusion should be nuanced: bishops were eager to maximise the success of their institution by promoting baptism, while it was not a "massive problem" for them.<sup>55</sup> Rebillard and Harmless recently agreed that there were no "masses of indifferent catechumens" delaying baptism until death.<sup>56</sup> This new scholarship rightly rejects the generalisation of deathbed baptism, and thus the view that the catechumenate was a failing and decadent institution. However, it still does not take enough account of the significance of catechumens. Starting from the rejection of these stereotypes on the ancient catechumenate, it is possible to go further and consider the catechumenate as a crucial phenomenon to understand early Christianity.

The negative appraisal concerning the fourth- and fifth-century catechumenate, as well as the relative disinterest in the *catechumeni* in early Christian studies in general result from a lack of enquiry on the *catechumeni* as a Christian category in its own right in Late Antiquity, well beyond the third century. The study of Augustine's evidence leads to considerably nuance Dujarrier's views and shows the significance of *catechumeni* as a liminal category in Augustine's life and pastoral care, particularly his effort to include them in his teaching. The study of other African evidence reinforces this conclusion by shedding light on attempts in regulating the position of *catechumeni* in Christian communities and on the role of rites and catechesis during the baptismal preparation for creating cohesion and defining community boundaries. The supposed "ritualisation" of the catechumenate with the spread of infant baptism can similarly be reconsidered through the sixth-century evidence clearly illustrating the continuity of pastoral issues from the preceding centuries in a changing context. The significance of catechumens, and thus of the catechumenate, lies precisely in their peculiar, liminal position at the threshold of the community.<sup>57</sup>

54 Rebillard, E., (1998a), 'La figure du catéchumène et le problème du délai du baptême dans la pastorale d'Augustin. A propos du *post-tractatum* Dolbeau 7: *De sepultura catechumenorum*', in Madec, G., (ed.), (1998), *Augustin prédicateur (395–411). Actes du Colloque International de Chantilly (5–7 septembre 1996)* (Paris), 285–292 translated as Id., 'Catechumens and the delay of baptism in the preaching of Augustine' in Id., (2013), *Transformations of Religious Practices in Late Antiquity* (London), 37–46; Rebillard (2012b), 40–53. Rebillard's views confirm doubts already expressed in Monachino (1947), 171.

55 Harmless (2014), 229; more broadly: 66–70, 225–229.

56 Rebillard (2012a), 65; Harmless (2014), 229.

57 Liminality is now a common concept widely applied in scholarship; it is often mentioned



### 3 Argument and Approach

The objective of this study is to develop a new perspective on the catechumenate, based on the demonstration of three major and related points. First, the catechumenate was a highly local and changing organisation: sources do not provide evidence for a single and standard way of initiating people to Christianity. Even within a limited geographical area like North Africa, practices varied widely and there was a high degree of freedom in the way catechumens were initiated.

Second, most sources on catechumens pertain to a context of polemics: while the study of Christianity in Africa is to a great extent the story of a series of controversies which permeate much of the literary production, this aspect appears to be particularly relevant for catechumens. Because of their peculiar position in the community, their integration constituted a major stake in disputes between competing churches and doctrines. The contextualisation of Augustine yields particularly important results, showing how catechumens were disputed against Donatists and their rites debated in controversies with Donatists and Pelagians. Thus, practices were subject to debate, could be adapted and varied locally, precisely as a result of a constant and creative re-thinking of the initiation into the Christian community within a context of intense rivalry.<sup>58</sup>

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in studies on early Christian baptism, see for instance Finn (1990), 600. In this book, I similarly employ liminality as a useful concept, without aiming to engage in ritual theory. For more discussion of the concept, see the seminal study of Gennep, A. van, (1909), *Les rites de passage* (Paris), esp. 14 and 133–136 (applied to Christian baptism, however blurring the distinction between the first phase of the catechumenate and the baptismal preparation). Later, Turner expanded this concept, understanding the liminal phase as a period in ritual processes when individuals are “betwixt and between”, contributing to upset and redefine society (see for example Turner, V., (1969), *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (London), esp. 94–130 on liminality and *communitas*). Turner, however, paved the way for the concept to be used in a much more flexible way to analyse modern societies, with the coinage of the term “liminoid” as a permanent liminal state. This reduces the specific significance of liminality to interpret rites of passage and as a consequence the ancient catechumenate. For a recent overview of these two figures and of scholarship on liminality, with more literature: Thomassen, B., (2014), *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham-Burlington VT), 21–89 and some new avenues for research at 90–110. On the relevance of these figures for early Christian rituals, see discussions in the articles assembled in Uro-Day-Roitto-DeMaris (2019), notably Bradshaw (2019). On ritual theory more generally see Bell, C., (1992), *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York-Oxford), and on its difficult relationship to history Buc, P., (2001), *Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton NJ-Oxford).

<sup>58</sup> In this book I employ the terms Manichaean, Arian, Donatist, Catholic, Christian and Pelagian as they are found in my sources written by representatives of the Nicene Church and

Third, the development of the liminal category of the catechumens was a necessary and essential feature of early Christianity until at least the sixth century, offering a powerful tool for renewal of the whole community by re-negotiating its boundaries.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the gradual incorporation of new members into a closely-knit community represented a challenge for clerics attempting to create a uniform Christian sense of belonging based on baptism. Exploring the development of the catechumenate in a context of polemics is therefore of crucial importance to better understand the dynamics behind conversion to Christianity and more broadly how Christian belonging was progressively defined.

To reach a better and nuanced understanding of the catechumenate in late antique North Africa, this investigation encompasses both Augustine's production and the rest of the African literary evidence, from the 360s to the early sixth century. Hence, while Augustine's abundant evidence will be at the core of this investigation, the focus is not on Augustine alone, but on Augustine's world and its destiny. This larger horizon will underline continuity in terms of the catechumens' significance in Christian communities and the pastoral problems that the catechumenate raised in African sources across the Roman and Vandal periods. The catechumenate for adults and its peculiar function in Christian communities can be traced throughout the period as the major process through which individuals negotiated their Christian belonging. Moreover, the continuation of a long-lasting African tradition leads me to assess the degree to which Augustine's writings influenced the rest of the preserved evidence; while fifth-century evidence seems to share a similar environment with Augustine, later sixth-century sources clearly borrowed Augustine's polemical arguments, theology and language in the controversies of the time against Arians and Pelagians.<sup>60</sup> This reclaiming of tradition brought attempts to draw normative

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of the Augustinian tradition. However, as I use these terms I acknowledge that Manichaeans considered themselves Christians, that Arian is an heresiological label designating homoian Christians, that Donatists considered themselves Catholic and that the term Pelagian is a polemical construct designating a wide variety of doctrinal views that cannot be reduced to a single movement or author. I take the view that in the lack of alternative terms that would accurately reflect the evidence available to the historian, it is better to use the terms already available, despite their polemical nature.

59 A recent book has taken a similar approach to study Christian identity, by focusing on how the *Song of Songs* was employed as a means to negotiate the boundaries of Christian communities and for self-definition, see Shuve, K., (2016), *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity* (Oxford), 13–14.

60 Anti-Manichaean polemics also continued in the fifth century, see for instance Leo the Great's anti-Manichaean sermons and the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus discussed in Chapter 5.

syntheses on the catechumenate that would define practices and ideas for generations. Comparing Augustine to near contemporary sources and focusing on how later writers integrated his views on the catechumenate contributes to restore a sense of balance in the study of late antique Africa and sheds light on the reception of Augustine, an area of research that raises increasing interest in recent scholarship and deserves further attention.<sup>61</sup>

Approaching the complexity of religious initiation requires adopting a definition of the catechumenate that is as broad as possible. Thus, I consider it as the time spent by individuals in the community as catechumens from the first rites enrolling them as catechumens in the Christian community until the beginning of baptismal rituals, generally at Easter Vigil—thus without restricting it to a particular aspect, whether teaching or rituals. Similarly, I have aimed to be as inclusive as possible in the selection of material to be included in this investigation. Literary sources have been selected thanks to repertories listing published sources from the fourth to the sixth century.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, archaeological evidence, while it is helpful to some extent to study baptismal rites, showing regional diversity, generally does not offer clear clues on the catechumenate in North Africa;<sup>63</sup> even epigraphical sources are of little help, since they mostly

61 See particularly Dolbeau, F., (2004), 'Un demi-siècle de travaux philologiques sur Augustin', *REAug* 50, 271–293; Graham, S.R., (2005), *The Dissemination of North African Christian and Intellectual Culture in Late Antiquity* (University of California Los Angeles PhD. Thesis); Weidmann, C., (2012), 'Augustine's Works in Circulation' and Leyser, C., (2012), 'Augustine in the Latin West, ca. 430–ca. 900', in Vessey (2012), respectively at 431–449 and 450–464; Dolbeau, F., (2013), 'La transmission des œuvres d'Augustin et l'évolution intellectuelle de l'Occident médiéval (ve–xve siècles)', *EthL* 89/4, 229–252; Boodts, S., (2019), 'Navigating the Vast Tradition of St. Augustine's Sermons: Old Instruments and New Approaches', *Augustiniana* 69/1, 83–115. A recent major reference work provides another starting point (however not always up-to-date and with entries of uneven quality): Pollman, K., and Willemien, O., (eds.), (2013), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford).

62 *CPL; CPPM*; Gryson, R., (2007), *Répertoire général des auteurs ecclésiastiques Latins de l'antiquité et du haut Moyen Âge*, 2 volumes (Freiburg).

63 For archaeology and the baptismal rite in Hippo see for instance Jensen, R., (2012a), 'Ancient Baptismal Spaces: Form and Function', *Studia Liturgica*, 108–129, esp. 118–121. Research has also attempted to connect double basilicas to the initiation process, although without clear evidence (see overviews of the issue in Piva, P., (1995), 'Basilica doppia: appunti sulla storiografia dell'ultimo decennio', *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 1, 111–116; Piva, P., (1996), 'La cattedrale doppia e la storia della liturgia', *AntTard* 4, 55–60). Other research has suggested the use of mosaics as potential sources for catechesis—for instance Dalla Barba Brusin, D., (1977), 'Una probabile *aedes catechizandorum* nell'ipogeo di S. Maria in Stelle in Val Pantena', *Aquileia Nostra* 48, 258–272; Pelizzari, D., (2010), *Il Pastore ad Aquileia. La trascrizione musiva della catechesi catecumenale nella cattedrale di Teodoro*

consist of standardised funerary inscriptions rarely containing details about initiation beyond the mention of baptism.<sup>64</sup> For the fourth and fifth centuries, Augustine's writings, canons of councils and the collection of sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus provide most of the evidence;<sup>65</sup> this has been complemented with a preliminary exploration of the numerous anonymous and pseudo-epigraphic sermons. After the fifth century, sources are particularly rare: there are no well dated and located sermons that would directly relate to the liturgical performance of the catechumenate and would give us an idea of how communities practised it.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, letters exchanged between

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(Villanova di San Daniele del Friuli). However, such studies are of limited value for the study of the catechumenate as it is not possible to demonstrate a clear connection between archaeological remains and attested ritual and teaching practices.

- 64 The only relevant epigraphic evidence found during my research are two inscriptions mentioning *audientes* which could be interpreted as references to catechumens: CIL VIII 23048 (Africa, Byzacena): "Bonifatia audi/ens in p(ace) christi vi/xit annu / unu et m(enses) IIII and [...s] audien/[...]vix an/[...]s duo/[...]in christo", listed Mazzoleni, D., (2002), *Epigrafi del mondo cristiano antico* (Rome), 36 and Carletti, C., (2008), *Epigrafia dei cristiani in Occidente dal III al VII secolo. Ideologia e prassi* (Bari), 55. The second fragment is dated between the fourth and the sixth centuries by Duval, N., (1976), *La mosaïque funéraire dans l'art paléochrétien* (Ravenna), 97–119. These fragments are ambiguous and cannot be used as relevant evidence for the study of the catechumenate.
- 65 This excludes three references to catechumens in Optatus of Milevis' *Contra Parmenianum*, one discussed below (for the distinction *catechumenus/fidelis*) and another in Chapter 3 in connection to Augustine's interpretation of 1 Cor 3, 6 against Donatists. In *Contra Parmenianum* v, 9.1 Optatus evokes the case of an evil-doing catechumen who postpones baptism. Hagiography could not be fully considered within the limits of this study. Nevertheless, out of the thirty late antique *Acta* and *Passiones*, those dating from the second half of the fourth century and later, whether "Donatist" or "Catholic", do not contain any particularly relevant information on the catechumenate, except a mention of the creed and the Lord's Prayer, discussed in Chapter 4. On these *Passiones* see the recent publication of Fialon, S., (2019), *Mens immobilis. Recherches sur le corpus latin des actes et des passions d'Afrique romaine (II<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris), based on Fialon, S., (2012), '*Mens immobilis*'. *Recherches sur le corpus latin des actes et des passions en Afrique romaine (II<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Université de Montpellier, PhD. Thesis), the latter also including editions and translations of the *Passiones*.
- 66 The "Donatist" collection of sermons (Leroy, F., (1999), 'Les 22 inédits de la catéchèse donatiste de Vienne. Une édition provisoire', *RecAug* 31, 149–234) contains little information on the catechumenate except a few references to signing foreheads discussed in chapters 2 and 5. Leroy's hypothesised that the collection represents Donatist catechesis (thus see Bass, A., (2014), *Fifth-Century Catechesis. An Introduction to the Vienna Collection ÖNB M. Lat. 4147* [St Louis University MO, PhD. Thesis]), but this remains uncertain. The sermons currently attributed to Fulgentius (FU s Frai in Gryson (2007), I, 498) are similarly uninformative; they should not be confused with the pseudo-Fulgentius collection of eighty sermons (PS-FU s in Gryson (2007), I, 499–501, notably PS-FU s 78 to

Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe in the early sixth century, provide essential evidence, although detached from the initiation process and attempting to define how the catechumenate should be understood more generally.<sup>67</sup> These letters are not isolated documents but reflect a trend reaching beyond Africa. I have therefore aimed at putting them in the wider context of late antique debates by analysing the remarkably similar exchange between the deacon John and Senarius written in Italy around the same period.

For Augustine's evidence, the selection of material has greatly benefited from Harmless' charts giving a list of all the references to catechumens identified in Augustine's writings.<sup>68</sup> Harmless did not fully exploit these charts but broadly investigated the teaching methods employed by Augustine and explored what both catechumens and baptised Christians heard mostly from Augustine's preaching.<sup>69</sup> Integrating Harmless' findings into a broader set of evidence including treatises and letters, opens new avenues of research and casts light on what Augustine recommended and taught to catechumens. The evidence assembled in Harmless' charts constituted the starting point of my enquiry; I then expanded it first through a detailed search in the *Library of Latin Texts A* (Brepols) database, where all works of Augustine are indexed, based on the main keywords referring to catechumens, particularly *catechumenus*, with all its spellings, and identified several additional occurrences.<sup>70</sup> Then, a number of particularly relevant works were read in detail: *De baptismo*; *De catechizandis rudibus*; *Confessiones*; *De fide et operibus*; *De fide et symbolo*; *De*

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*competentes*; P.-M. Bogaert and I prepare a new study of the collection). A number of pseudo-epigraphic and anonymous sermons of possible late antique African are more relevant: some are perhaps authentic sermons of Fulgentius according to Dolbeau, see PS-AU s Dol 1–7, PS-FU s Mor and s Lem in Gryson (2007), 1, 502–503; Dolbeau, F., (2001), 'Sept sermons antiques tirés d'un homélaire latin d'Olomouc', *RBen* 111, 353–398 and Dolbeau, F., (2002), 'À propos des sermons d'Olomouc: un post-scriptum', *RBen* 112, 236–245 reprinted in Dolbeau, F., (2005), *Augustin et la prédication en Afrique. Recherches sur divers sermons authentiques, apocryphes ou anonymes* (Paris), 399–445 and 446–455; while Dolbeau first expressed doubts, at *ibid.* 693 he asserts that the sermons should be attributed to Fulgentius. Besides issues of dating and localisation, the detailed study of all these sermons is beyond the scope of this book; a sample is examined in Chapter 5.

67 For the sixth century, there are as well two brief passing remarks about catechumens in Verecundus of Iunca and Iunilius Africanus, which are mentioned in connection to the evidence presented in Chapters 4 and 5 about the baptismal preparation.

68 Harmless (2014), 229–234 and 348–350 provides charts focusing on *catechumeni* and *competentes*.

69 For instance, Harmless (2014), 235–283 explores a winter preaching series involving a mixed audience (on which see Chapter 4, 1, pp. 183–187).

70 [www.brepols.net](http://www.brepols.net) (last accessed 10/7/2019).

*gestis Pelagii; De Peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum; Retractationes*, and the Dolbeau sermons.<sup>71</sup>

The amount of evidence assembled allows a renewed study. The investigation shows that in comparison to other contemporary sources, Augustine's evidence is not only exceptional for its size, dwarfing the literary production of any other author from the Latin West, but also for the attention devoted to *catechumeni*. While the baptismal preparation of candidates (*competentes*) during the Lenten period has received much attention from scholars, particularly because it can be studied in a relatively wide range of sources in and beyond Augustine, very few sources are available to study what it meant to become and be a *catechumenus* in a Christian community of Late Antiquity. Augustine is therefore a major source and the starting point of this enquiry to study the *catechumeni* as a specific Christian category of great significance.

Moreover, Augustine is not only a witness to the distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles* as two categories of Christians (*christiani*),<sup>72</sup> but he also draws a consistent distinction between the *catechumeni* on one side, and the *competentes*, the candidates for baptism on the other, as already noted by Poque and Harmless.<sup>73</sup> These are clearly technical terms consistently used: in the *De fide et operibus* and Sermon 392, the bishop distinguishes between two categories of partially initiated Christians with the terms *catechumenus* and *competens*.<sup>74</sup> Evidence on the rite of giving one's name to enter the prepara-

71 See Dolbeau, F., (2009), *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique*, 2nd revised edition (Paris).

72 In the footsteps of Optatus, *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam* v, 7.3: "Sic alba lana regalem transit in purpuram, quomodo catechumenus in fidelem" (Labrousse, SC 413 (1996), 142). For Augustine, see S. 46, 31: "Quaeris: Paganusne es, an christianus?" Respondet: 'Christianus': ovis est enim Dei. Quaeris ne forte catechuminus sit, et irruat sacramentis. Respondet: 'Fidelis'" (Lambot, CCL 41 (1961), 557); *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2: "Interroga hominem: 'Christianus es?' Respondet tibi: 'Non sum', si paganus est aut Iudaeus. Si autem dixerit: 'Sum'; adhuc quaeris ab eo: 'Catechumenus, an fidelis?'" (Willems, CCL 36 (1955), 382; on this text see Jourjon, M., (1955), 'Minuties augustinienes', *Vigiliae Christianae* 9, 249–253). See more on *christianus* and *catechumenus* in Lamirande (1963; 1992a); Id., (1992b), 'Christianus (christianismus, christianitas)', *AL* 1, fasc. 5/6, 842–845. As noted by Bingham (1840), 260, this clear distinction is already found in a law from 383 against apostasy (*Codex Theodosianus*, XVI, 7.2: 'Christianis ac fidelibus, qui ad paganos ritus cultusque migrarunt. [...] His vero, qui christiani et catechumeni tantum [...]', Mommsen, Th., Meyer, P., (1905), *Codex Theodosianus*, vol. 1, pars 2 (Berlin), 884).

73 Poque, S., (1971), 'Trois semaines de prédication à Hippone en février-mars 407. Le *Tractatus in Iohannis Euangelium* XI et l'appel aux catéchumènes', *RecAug* 7, 169–187, at 178–183; Harmless (2014), 295. The same distinction is noted more broadly beyond Augustine by Gavrilyuk (2007), 193–194 n. 3.

74 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6.9; S. 392, 2.

tion for baptism shows that for Augustine *competens* is not merely a category of *catechumenus* but truly represents a new status, different from that of *catechumenus*: the transition enacted by giving one's name transformed the candidate's position within the community, which was reflected in the terminology.<sup>75</sup> As Poque explains, using Augustine's imagery, *catechumeni* are conceived in the womb but *competentes* are already in the stage of labour.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Augustine never employs *catechumenus* to refer to the current status of his hearers in any of his sermons preached to *competentes* on the creed and the Lord's Prayer.<sup>77</sup> While some inconsistency of vocabulary could be understandable in other contexts, in the case of preached texts to his congregation, the use of specific technical terms corresponds to specific categories in his audience. Thus, the existence of a distinctive category of the *catechumeni* is a remarkable fact that will guide our study of Augustine's evidence, shedding light on a little-known aspect of late antique Christianity. Instead of considering the catechumenate only as a process of initiation from conversion to baptism, I take Augustine's writings as a key to explore the role of *catechumeni* as a longstanding group within Christian communities of Late Antiquity.

The investigation of Augustine's evidence is not only useful to understand Augustine's viewpoint and experience but more broadly sheds light on practices and ideas about the catechumenate in late antique Africa. Indeed, bearing in mind that Augustine certainly offers a very specific viewpoint, his assumptions are built on a shared world. This is particularly relevant for the study of preaching: sermons are dialogues and not merely monologues as they might seem. Sermons speak the words of the preacher but they still convey much on the shared experience of the preacher and the audience.<sup>78</sup> Dossey has argued,

75 Augustine, S. 216; 228, 1; 229, 1: "*Quando catechumeni differebamini, in horreo servabamini. Nomina vestra dedistis, coepistis moli ieiuniis et exorcismis*" (PL 38 (1841), 116). The catechumens' status is distinguished from the giving of names. On this ritual see Chapter 4, 1.

76 Poque (1971), 178–182.

77 Augustine, S. 56–59 and 212–215; in S. 212, 2 he speaks of their status of *catechumeni* in the past tense: "*hoc est ergo symbolum quod vobis per scripturas et sermones ecclesiasticos iam catechuminis insinuatum est*" (Poque, SC 116 (1966), 184). See also S. 351–352 on penitence; this material is discussed in Poque (1971).

78 See Rebillard, E., (1997), 'Interaction between the Preacher and his Audience: The Case-Study of Augustine's Preaching on Death', *Studia Patristica* 31, 86–96; Dagemark, S., (2004), 'Augustine's Sermons. Circulation and Authenticity Evidenced by Examples of Preaching and Response', in *Comunicazione e ricezione del documento cristiano in epoca tardoantica*, (2004), XXXII *Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità cristiana, Roma, 8–10 maggio 2003* (Rome), 693–761; Rebillard, E., (2018), 'Sermons, Audience, Preacher', in Dupont, A., Boodts, S., Partoens, G., Leemans, J., (eds.), (2018), *Preaching in the Patristic Era. Sermons, Preachers, and Audiences in the Latin West*, Leiden-Boston, 87–102; Ribreau, M., *Intendat caritas*

in the steps of MacMullen, that preaching to *competentes* betrays a mostly upper-class audience, with outsiders joining the congregation on special occasions.<sup>79</sup> While it is understandable that Augustine paid particular attention in his sermons to prominent members of the congregation, the frequent use of agricultural metaphors for instance—well highlighted by Dossey—shows that sermons could appeal to a broader audience. Furthermore, Augustine was aware of the fact that his sermons were used in other contexts after they were transcribed, for instance to be preached by others, while the sermons of Augustine that we read today are the result of a later selection of the material.<sup>80</sup> Scholars have also emphasised Augustine's frequent mentions of the lack of homogeneity of his audience, and his aim to reach an audience as wide as possible.<sup>81</sup> Thus, while it is difficult, on the basis of the sermons as we have them, to reconstruct the specific composition of Augustine's audience, it was probably quite variegated, and individuals from all backgrounds certainly took part in the initiation.

To some extent, even the rest of Augustine's literary production needs to be understood as more than one single voice speaking: letters are shared documents, based on shared conventions, with an audience and an influence going far beyond the limited dialogue of correspondents, while treatises are almost without exception writings reacting to specific situations, often written to respond to a particular need or controversy.<sup>82</sup> They were a powerful device to disseminate views and to some extent reflect shared problems and ideas: when not actively promoting the diffusion of his works, the author was aware of the potential spread of his writings to wider audiences and wrote accordingly.

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*uestra*: l'attention comme participation dans les *Sermons* d'Augustin', in Wyler, S., Valette, E., (eds.), *Spectateurs: corps, présence, attention*, forthcoming.

79 Dossey, L., (2010), *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley-London), 149–153 following on MacMullen, R., (1989), 'The Preacher's Audience (AD 350–400)', *JTS* 40, 503–511, esp. 508–509; see a recent overview with some nuances in Rebillard (2018), esp. 88–90.

80 An overview of the transmission of Latin late antique preaching in Dolbeau, F., 'La Transmission de la Prédication Antique de Langue Latine', in Dupont-Boodts-Partoens-Leemans (2018), 31–58 and on Augustine, Boodts, S., Dupont, A., (2018), 'Augustine of Hippo', in Dupont-Boodts-Partoens-Leemans (2018), 177–197 at 178–181.

81 See Boodts-Dupont (2018), 190.

82 See Rebillard, É., (1998b), 'Augustin et le rituel épistolaire de l'élite sociale et culturelle de son temps', in Rebillard, É., Sotinel, C., (eds.), (1998), *L'évêque dans la cité du IV<sup>e</sup> au V<sup>e</sup> siècle. Image et autorité* (Rome), 127–152; Miles, R., (2008), 'Let's (not) Talk About it: Augustine and the Control of Epistolary Dialogue', and Lim, R., (2008), 'Christians, Dialogues and Patterns of Sociability in Late Antiquity', in Goldhill, S., (2008), *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (Cambridge), 135–148 and 151–172; Ebbeler, J., (2012), *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (Oxford-New York).



Indeed, as this study will further help to show, Augustine understood and fully exploited the potential of his literary production as a means for pastoral action.

Augustine's material will thus be at the core of this investigation, both providing a starting point and a way to reach a deeper understanding of African practices and thought. Beyond Augustine, the exploration of contemporary and later African sources will then help restoring some balance in the evidence and lead to a refined understanding of the catechumenate in late antique Africa. This broader scope highlights strong commonalities in the evidence, so correcting the impression of Augustine's idiosyncrasy and situating him in a wider African environment. At the same time, it sheds light on local adaptations and leads me to evaluate the weight of Augustine's influence on other Africans.

Finally, this book aims to renew scholarship not only by considering a wider spectrum of sources, but also by adopting a historical approach, therefore devoting constant attention to the specific context of writing of each piece of evidence. A better contextualisation of Augustine's evidence, putting it in the chronology of his life and works, has never been attempted, even in Harmless' informative study,<sup>83</sup> while other African sources have been little studied. Such an approach brings me to reconsider the conclusions of previous scholarship on the organisation of the catechumenate by showing that diversity in the evidence goes against reconstructing a single path of initiation. Every time that Augustine and other Africans preached or wrote, mentioning catechumens, the specific context behind the text plays a role in the perspective adopted. African sources inform us about rites, the catechesis to be given, and refer to catechumens in a variety of works and genres, always with a clear intent. They shed light on the catechumenate just as much as they contribute to shape it over time.

#### 4 Plan of Chapters

The first four chapters are dedicated to a detailed study of Augustine's evidence. In Chapter 1, the investigation starts from Augustine's own catechumenate, the best-documented initiation journey of a catechumen in Late Antiquity. Not to be dismissed as mere retrospective reconstructions, Augustine's recollections about his own catechumenate provide valuable insights on the fluidity of affil-

83 The charts about *catechumeni* and *competentes* (Harmless (2014), 229–234 and 348–350) do not give the dating or the circumstances of composition of each text.

iations and the progressive nature of religious belonging. At the same time, the exploration of Augustine's views also shows the extent to which the evidence is impregnated by the immediate concerns of the writer. This study opens the way to examine more broadly the practicalities of the catechumenate and the significance of the catechumens' status in polemics in late antique Africa through the lenses of Augustine as a leading cleric of his community. Chapter 2 investigates Augustine's evidence about the process of admission into the catechumenate, then suggests the importance and repetition of special rites designed for *catechumeni* over the course of their membership, meant to highlight their peculiar status as partially included Christians. By setting catechumens apart, rites delimited clear boundaries and at the same time concretely established a path of progression. Moreover, Augustine's references to the rites mostly pertain to his fight against Donatists over rebaptism and against Pelagians over the necessity of infant baptism, showing that catechumens were a disputed group.

Chapters 3 and 4 conclude the investigation on Augustine by exploring evidence for the second phase of the catechumenate leading *catechumeni* to baptism and full integration into the community. They show the significance of this ritual transition for Christian communities. In Chapter 3, I first explore how Augustine understood and negotiated the transition from the status of *catechumenus* to that of petitioner for baptism (*competens*). Beyond the customary yearly calls to catechumens to enrol for baptism around the beginning of Lent, the broadest possible study of Augustine's evidence, encompassing sermons, letters, and theological treatises, shows that in a variety of contexts, and throughout his life, bringing catechumens to closer integration was a major concern of Augustine. This, however, required negotiation and dialogue: thus Augustine, particularly in sermons and letters, indirectly conveys the views of catechumens, providing precious insights into the challenges that this progressive integration brought for Christian communities.

Those catechumens who decided to take the step underwent an intensive initiation during Lent, the climax of their catechumenate, leading them to be reborn into new members, the faithful (*fideles*). Chapter 4 explores this process, showing how it was designed to deeply impress the minds of candidates through frequent repetition of rituals and specific teaching, notably focusing on the creed and the Lord's Prayer. While pre-baptismal initiation has already received considerable attention in scholarship, this chapter highlights that, when one refrains from merging Augustine's evidence with other contemporary sources to draw a standardised view of the catechumenate, there is still great uncertainty about practices in Augustine's community. Reconsidering Augustine's evidence leads to show that initiation might have been more flexibly organised than generally assumed.

The broader scope of the book is then to put the writings of Augustine in a wider perspective. Chapter 5 explores the catechumenate in other African sources from the fourth and fifth centuries. The study of conciliar legislation sets Augustine's attempts at normalising the catechumenate within a wider trend under Aurelius' primacy; the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus focusing on the baptismal preparation furnish unique descriptions of rituals and extensive catecheses, showing that catechesis played a crucial role to create cohesion and build a united community in a context of competition for members between Arians and Catholics. The study of these sermons is then further expanded to take anonymous sermons of possible African origin into account—through a first selective study—further demonstrating the degree of variety in practices, the extent of local adaptations of the initiation and the inventive nature of pre-baptismal catechesis.

Chapter 6 closes the investigation by tracing the evolution of the catechumenate in the last available African sources from the early sixth century. The letter exchange between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe, which is compared to the contemporary and better known letter of the Roman deacon John to the Italian aristocrat Senarius, informs us on the continuing uneasiness of clerics with the status of catechumens in their communities, emphasising the lasting importance of the catechumenate as the path to acquire Christian membership. Against previous assumptions, this chapter shows that these documents do not witness a sort of medieval ritualisation, but reflect the early reception of African sources, particularly Augustine's writings and canonical collections, which impinged on the debates of the time and contributed to their renewed focus on the rites of the catechumenate.

## Augustine the Catechumen: Patterns and Narrative

Augustine is the most informative source to study the catechumenate in late antique Africa but he also is one of very few individuals who reflected back on their own catechumenate. Starting the exploration of Augustine from his own perspective about his time as a catechumen provides both an introduction to the complexities of the catechumenate in late antique Africa through a well-known *parcours* and demonstrates the necessity of a detailed contextualisation of the evidence to gain new insights into material which is shaped by the circumstances in which Augustine wrote. Studies which focus on Augustine's life before baptism or on Augustine's conversion abound,<sup>1</sup> and Augustine has often been used as a source for the history of the catechumenate and baptism.<sup>2</sup> However, there has been little work on Augustine's own catechumenate and even less work restricting the enquiry to Augustine's point of view. As I show in this study, the major biographies and studies of Augustine's life tend at best to allude to his catechumenate without any specific enquiry,<sup>3</sup> while the few studies addressing this aspect leave little room for Augustine's African catechumen-

1 See surveys with extensive bibliography in Madec, G., (1989), 'Le néoplatonisme dans la conversion d'Augustin. État d'une question centenaire (depuis Harnack et Boissier, 1888)', in Mayer, C., Chelius, K.H., (eds.), (1989), *Internationales Symposium über den Stand der Augustinus-Forschung* (Würzburg), 9–25 and Madec, G., (1994), 'Conversio', *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1282–1294. See as well: Courcelle, P., (1968), *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, 2nd edition (Paris); Ferrari, L.C., (1984), *The Conversions of Saint Augustine* (Villanova); Id., (1989), 'Saint Augustine's Conversion Scene: The End of a Modern Debate?', *SP* 22, 235–250; Ries, J., (2005), 'La conversion de saint Augustin du manichéisme au catholicisme: controverses anciennes et positions récentes', in Tongerloo, A. van, Cirillo, L., (eds.), (2005), *Il Manicheismo. Nuove prospettive della ricerca. Quinto congresso internazionale di studi sul Manicheismo* (Turnhout), 355–371; Dobell, B., (2009), *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion: The Journey from Platonism to Christianity* (Cambridge); BeDuhn, J., (2009 and 2013), *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*. Volume 1: *Conversion and Apostasy*, 373–388 C.E. Volume 2: *Making a 'Catholic' Self*, 388–401 (Philadelphia).

2 See Introduction, note 44.

3 Van der Meer (1961), 347, 351, 359; Mandouze, A., (1968), *Saint Augustin. L'aventure de la raison et de la grâce* (Paris), 84–85; Lancel, S., (1999b), *Saint Augustin* (Paris) 30, 36; Brown, P., (2000), *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, revised edition (Berkeley) 30, 34, 70–71, 116–120; Bonner, G., (2002), *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, 3rd edition (Norwich), 38–39; O'Donnell, J.J., (2005), *Augustine: a New Biography* (New York), 53–61, 212–213; Chadwick, H., (2009), *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (New York), 7, 25, 33, 38, 116–117; Lane Fox, R., (2015), *Augustine. Conversions and Confessions* (London), 38, 45–48, 191, 195.

ate, focusing on the Milanese period and often examining it by merging all relevant contemporary sources to reconstruct his experience.<sup>4</sup> This study will therefore explore and critically assess Augustine's catechumenate *per se* from the very beginning until baptism, deliberately focusing on Augustine's own words. Thus, while still setting Augustine's experience in the context of initiation practices and catechesis in Milan, I will not attempt to fully reconstruct what Augustine might have experienced on the basis of external evidence. I rather aim to concentrate on how he narrated, understood and exploited his own experience as a catechumen in his writings. This will have the main advantage of sharpening the focus on Augustine's perspective and open the way for a better understanding of his own role in shaping the catechumenate in African communities, and more broadly of his influence on contemporaries and in the century after his death.

The first goal of this chapter is to make full use of the rare opportunity of following a late antique catechumen's journey from birth to baptism. I argue that Augustine became a catechumen later than is generally thought and that this initiation should be reassessed taking into account new hypotheses about the initiation of his parents Monnica and Patricius. Moreover, I particularly shed light on the links between Augustine's youth as a Christian catechumen and as a Manichaean hearer and stress the overlapping features of the two categories. Augustine grew up as a Christian in Africa, converted to Manichaeism in this context and, as a Manichaean hearer, was never fundamentally far from returning to Catholic Christianity. Concerning his stay and conversion in Milan, I suggest that while Augustine particularly wanted to emphasise his involvement in church practices upon his arrival in Milan, he seems to have made his full commitment to baptism only later, during his stay in Cassiciacum.

The second goal of this chapter is to carefully contextualise the evidence: no work was written by Augustine with the intent of giving to the reader an overview of his initiation. Instead, each of his works followed specific objectives. Thus, this chapter offers a new assessment of Augustine's recollections of

4 Busch (1938), 385–483, at 385–390; Wills (2012), 59–133; Harmless (2014), 88–130 all offer broad surveys the latter two focusing on Milan. Shorter summaries: Courcelle (1968), 211–221; Trapè, A., (1974), 'La Chiesa milanese e la conversione di s. Agostino', *Archivio Ambrosiano* 27, 5–24; Della Corte, F., (1986), 'Agostino catecumeno', in *Cultura e scuola* 25, n. 97, 89–96 reprinted in Della Corte, F., (1987), *Opuscula* (Genoa), 207–216; Lamirande (1992a), 791; Oort, J. van, (1991), *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden), 25–30; Finn (1997), 215–235; Finn, Th., (1998), 'Ritual and Conversion: The Case of Augustine', in Petruccione, J., (ed.), (1998), *Nova et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington DC), 148–161; Madec, G., (2001), *Le Christ de saint Augustin: La patrie et la voie*, 2nd edition (Paris), 23–32; Vopřáda (2020), 101–105.

his catechumenate, showing that they concentrate at key moments with specific concerns: the writings of Cassiciacum; the anti-Manichaean writings of the priesthood; the *Confessiones*; the Pelagian controversy, in particular in 411–413, when he wrote the treatise *De fide et operibus* and recalled his initiation in Milan in his correspondence; finally, polemical writings against Julian of Aeclanum written between 418 and 421. It is crucial, for our understanding of Augustine's life, to assess whether and how his views changed over time. This study contributes to the debate on Augustine's change of perspective between 386 and the *Confessiones* and later, by both emphasising continuity concerning the core elements of Augustine's recollections of his catechumenate and highlighting a telling evolution in terms of a more positive appraisal of his youth as a bishop.<sup>5</sup> Finally, more generally, and in particular for the *Confessiones*, I will underline that Augustine used the narrative of his own catechumenate as a proreptic to bring other catechumens to conversion. This assessment, however, will not lead me to entirely mistrust Augustine's account or only study it as a retrospective reconstruction: in doing so, I would not fully exploit valuable information contained in Augustine's writings.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, I combine a critical assessment of the evidence, in light of Augustine's particular concerns and aims, with a careful synthesis of what Augustine still conveys, both willingly and casually, on his lived experience.

The complexity of this research is precisely to keep a proper balance between the two chronologies in Augustine's life: his experience as a catechumen and references to it in his literary production. Indeed, the two only briefly overlap in the writings of Cassiciacum: the rest of Augustine's discussion about his catechumenate is written after the events. As a result of the lack of works written in his youth, it is not possible to follow Augustine reflecting on his own experience without interruption. However, despite our dependence on his later intermittent recollections, it is still possible and illuminating to follow his experience over time. Thus, this study follows the chronology of Augustine's catechumenate to shed light on his experience and, at the same time, it pays

5 Harrison, C., (2006), *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: an Argument for Continuity* (Oxford), by focusing on these dialogues and relating them to broader themes of Augustine's theology (esp. 35–73), has reassessed the widely accepted assumption that Augustine's views and theology radically changed in 396 when he became a bishop. On this debate see the overview in Harrison (2006), 3–9 notably discussing the diverging views of Brown (break) and Madec (continuity).

6 I disagree, for instance, with the reductive perspective recently adopted by BeDuhn (2009; 2013). For a critical review of this approach, see Oort, J. van, (2011), 'Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma in Context', *VChr* 65, 543–567. For the debate on the reliability of Augustine's account in the *Confessiones*: Madec (1989); Ries (2005).

attention to the context in which he wrote to show how the appreciation and use of his own past evolved in correspondence to the key moments that I have evoked. In this respect, the writings of Cassiciacum will be analysed as an exception in Augustine's works, providing the only account of Augustine the catechumen writing about his own catechumenate.

## 1 Household and Church: Integration into the Catechumenate

### 1.1 A parentibus: *The Role of Augustine's Household*

Augustine's upbringing as a Christian and more precisely as a catechumen is primarily known to us thanks to his autobiographical narrative in the *Confessiones*. However, it may be overlooked that before he wrote the *Confessiones* as a newly appointed bishop, Augustine already provided more general and allusive references to his Christian background. In fact, a close perusal of the evidence demonstrates that his youth as a catechumen in Africa is the most often alluded to and quoted element of his Christian initiation in his works and, at the same time, the *Confessiones* are the last time when Augustine refers to this aspect of his life, except for a brief reference to himself as *catechumenus* in the *Contra Cresconium* between 405 and 407.<sup>7</sup> This striking and unnoticed fact seems to suggest that Augustine particularly valued and emphasised these aspects in the period from his conversion in 386 to the composition of the *Confessiones* (between 397 and 403), while they became more irrelevant later.<sup>8</sup>

Augustine already recalls this past in the *Contra academicos*, a philosophical dialogue among the earliest of his preserved writings, composed as a catechumen at Cassiciacum towards the end of 386 or early in 387.<sup>9</sup> In the prologue

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *Cresc.* IV, 64.79, see note 96.

<sup>8</sup> The composition of *Conf.* most probably began in 397; however, despite several attempts to provide an accurate dating—see most recently Lane Fox (2015) suggesting a composition in a few weeks in spring 397—there are few clues to be certain about when the work was completed. This issue is intimately related to the question of the unity of the work despite its three parts (books I–IX, X, XI–XIII). See an overview of issues in Feldmann, E., (1994), 'Confessiones', *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1134–1193, at 1143–1157 and 1184–1185. While the consensus was to favour a *terminus ante quem* in 401, Hombert, P.-M., (2000), *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne* (Paris), 12–23 has suggested that the work (more precisely book X) was completed in 403 because of close parallels with *In Ps.* 36, 111 from September 403.

<sup>9</sup> The dialogue took place in autumn 386 and was then put into writing. From what Augustine tells us in the review of his works at the end of his life (*Retr.* I, 1.1–3.1), he first began composing *Acad.* I, then moved to the other works written at Cassiciacum (*Beata u.*, *Ord.* and *Sol.*), then finally completed *Acad.* II–III (see a discussion of the process of composition and its dating in Catapano, G., (2005), *Agostino. Contro gli Accademici* (Milan), 7–10).

of the second book to Romanianus, in a first autobiographical recollection, Augustine acknowledges Romanianus' role as a mentor who guided him in the quest for truth. He particularly recalls how the reading of the Platonic books led him to reconsider the religion of his youth: "Swiftly did I begin to return entirely to myself. However, let me admit it, I looked back almost in passing (*de itinere*) to that religion (*religio*) which was implanted (*insita*) in me as a child (*puer*) and bound up in the marrow of my bones. But she indeed was drawing me unknowing to herself".<sup>10</sup> The meaning of this passage seems to be that when Augustine starts reconsidering his views through the reading of the Platonic books, he admits that he started to come back to the religion of his youth almost naturally and unconsciously. This almost inevitable return to the religion of his youth then brought him—Augustine tells us immediately thereafter—to read the decisive letters of Paul.<sup>11</sup> Augustine therefore explains the fundamental and underlying role played by this religious background to understand how he came to the conversion in Milan. Significantly, later allusions to his religious upbringing use very similar terminology, but in a different context, showing that Augustine's remark here refers to a deeply ingrained aspect of his religious journey. These concentrate first in two anti-Manichaean works written at the beginning of the priesthood (391–392), the *De utilitate credendi* addressed to the Manichaean Honoratus and the *De duabus animabus* written to all his Manichaean friends, and then in the *Confessiones*.<sup>12</sup>

10 Augustine, *Acad.* 11, 2.5: "*Prorsus totus in me cursim redibam. Respexi tamen, confiteor, quasi de itinere in illam religionem, quae pueris nobis insita est et medullitus implicata; verum autem ipsa ad se nescientem rapiebat*" (Führer, *BT* 2022 (2017), 28; O'Meara, *ACW* 12 (1951), 70 adapted). There has been debate about the *tamen* reading in this passage (which however has been adopted in Green's and Führer's critical editions on the basis of the manuscript tradition; alternative readings are *tandem* and *tantum*), and on how to translate "*de itinere*", which I render as "in passing" following most commentators. There has been considerable speculation about this passage and in particular about the books that were read by Augustine and their role in bringing him to reconsider the religion of his youth. See useful considerations in Courcelle, P., (1948), *Les lettres grecques en Occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris), 179–181; Madec, G., (1971), 'Pour l'interprétation de *Contra Academicos* 11, 2.5', *REAug* 17 (1971), 322–328, esp. 327; Führer, T., (1997), *Augustin 'Contra Academicos' (vel 'De Academicis') Bücher 2 und 3, Einleitung und Kommentar* (Berlin-New York), 96–99; Catapano, G., (2001), *Il concetto di filosofia nei primi scritti di Agostino: analisi dei passi metafilosofici dal Contra Academicos al De vera religione* (Rome), 83–85; Harrison (2006), 23–27. For introductions to *Acad.*, with bibliography, see Voss, B.R., (1986), 'Academicis (De -)', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 45–52; Catapano (2005), 7–68.

11 Augustine, *Acad.* 11, 2.5.

12 On *Util. cred.* see Hoffmann, A., (1997), *Augustins Schrift 'De utilitate credendi'. Eine Analyse* (Münster), for the dating: 35–37. On *Duab. an.*: Decret, F., (1978), *L'Afrique manichéenne*



First, at the beginning of the *De utilitate credendi* and of the *De duabus animabus* the expressions used are: “the religion which was implanted in me as a child by my parents (*religione quae mihi puerulo a parentibus insita erat*)” and “the seeds of the most true religion wholesomely implanted in me since childhood (*religionis verissimae semina mihi a pueritia salubriter insita*)”.<sup>13</sup> Then, in the *De utilitate credendi*, Augustine recalls how he returned to the “Church to which I had been brought by my parents (*ecclesia cui traditus a parentibus eram*)”, while in the *Confessiones* he speaks of “the Catholic Church recommended to me by my parents (*catholica ecclesia mihi a parentibus commendata*)”, then of the “name of Christ put on me as an infant (*mihi nomen Christi infanti est inditum*)” and finally of his status of catechumen as a child: “Let me fix my feet on that step (*gradu*) where as a boy I was placed by my parents (*a parentibus positus*)”.<sup>14</sup> Augustine is remarkably consistent in linking his affiliation with the Church and Christianity to the action of his household. *Insitus* and *positus* convey the idea of the action of making him a catechumen and thus fixing him in the Church in the corresponding grade (*gradus*).<sup>15</sup> They refer precisely to the beginning of Augustine's Christian belonging. The image of planting is common in Augustine and refers here to the ritual actions of the initiation, when he was enrolled as a catechumen in Africa.<sup>16</sup> The other phrases describe initiation as a heritage rather than a beginning; it is the Church entrusted to him, to which he can refer and on which he can build.

Beyond these distinctive features, there are however a number of important differences, which point to two different contexts of writing. At the beginning of the *De duabus animabus* and the *De utilitate credendi* Augustine refers to his youth to explain the circumstances of his adhesion to Manichaeism: here he wants to show to his African Manichaean friends how wrong he was in abandoning the religion of his youth and adhering to Manichaeism. On the contrary, in the middle of the *De utilitate credendi* and in all the passages of the *Confessiones*—except for the description of his enrolment as a catechu-

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(1<sup>re</sup>–2<sup>es</sup> siècles). *Étude historique et doctrinale*, 2 volumes (Paris), 1, 81–92; Decret, F., (2001), ‘Duabus animabus (De –)’, *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 667–672.

13 Augustine, *Util. cred.* 1, 2 (Zycha, J., *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 4); *Duab. an.* 1, 1 (*ibid.*, 51).

14 Augustine, *Util. cred.* 8, 20 (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 25); *Conf.* V, 14.25; VI, 4.5; 11.18 (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 72, 77, 86; Chadwick, H., (1991), *Saint Augustine. Confessions* (Oxford), 104 adapted).

15 As noted as well by Mandouze (1968), 91 and Wright, D.F., (1998), ‘Monica's Baptism, Augustine's Deferred Baptism, and Patricius’, *AugStud* 29/2, 1–17, at 15, reprinted in Id., (2007), *Infant Baptism in a Historical Perspective. Collected Studies* (Milton Keynes), 89–104.

16 See Chapter 2, p. 108.

men in the first book of the *Confessiones*, which I will analyse in the next section—Augustine discusses this Christian upbringing to explain how and why he decided to return to the Catholic Church in Milan. Interestingly, he only refers to his *parentes* first in the *De utilitate credendi* and in the *Confessiones* to refer to this return. Moreover, Augustine does not restrict this heritage to his mother Monnica, contrary to what studies of Augustine's youth generally emphasise, but systematically to his *parentes*.<sup>17</sup> Van Oort, who already noted this, read Augustine's references to the recommendation of his *parentes* as a later tribute to Augustine's father Patricius, who was baptised shortly before death, when Augustine was in Carthage for his studies; Patricius would have inspired Augustine to return to the Church in Milan years later.<sup>18</sup> More broadly, the term *parentes* may refer not only to his parents, but also to his relatives in general, thus pointing to Augustine's household.<sup>19</sup> It is also particularly significant that Augustine used a generic terminology (*religio*) both in the *Contra academicos* and in the works from the priesthood when referring to his Christian youth before adhering to Manichaeism, while in the description of his return to Christianity in Milan in the *De utilitate credendi* and the *Confessiones*, he resorts to distinctive Church terminology (*ecclesia*; *catholica ecclesia*; *nomen Christi*; *gradus*). This suggests the development of a more complex narrative of inclusion in terms of worship and Church membership in Milan. The *Contra academicos* is the only instance when Augustine employs *religio* to refer to the reclaiming in Milan of his African Christian upbringing; all this seems to point to a progressive change of perspective. Augustine, as a cleric, aimed to closely associate, in the narrative of his conversion, his initiations in Africa and Italy, with a particular reference to his household. It seems to have been particularly important, when developing this narrative in a clerical context, to connect his return to the Catholic community to the action of his relatives, while at the same time emphasising ritual integration in Milan.

## 1.2 *Augustine's Entrance into the Catechumenate*

In the first book of the *Confessiones*, because of the autobiographical character of his work, Augustine furnishes a detailed description of his incorporation into the Christian community. First, in the narrative of his infancy, Augustine recalls:

<sup>17</sup> Also noted by Wright (1998), 15.

<sup>18</sup> van Oort (1991), 28–30.

<sup>19</sup> Lamirande (1992a), 791; van Oort (1991), 27; Wright (1998), 15 all read *parentes* literally.

We found however, Lord, people (*homines*) who prayed to you and from them we learnt to think of you, in our limited way, as some large being with the power, even when not present to our senses, of hearing us and helping us. As a boy (*puer*) I began to pray to you.<sup>20</sup>

This is the first passage of the *Confessiones* explicitly referring to Augustine's Christian upbringing. The *homines* that he recalls, although the term is generic and very common in Augustine, could refer to clerics.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that Augustine says that he learnt (*didicimus*) from them to pray and to think of God. These allusive remarks do not tell us to what extent these men were involved in Augustine's official enrolment in the Church, but they hint at the fact that Augustine was taught in some way about Christianity, again as a *puer*.<sup>22</sup> A few paragraphs later, he then provides the most precise reference in all his works about his initiation:

When I was still a boy (*adhuc puer*), I had heard (*audieram*) about eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord God, coming down to our pride, and I was already signed with the sign of the cross and seasoned with salt from the time I came from my mother's womb (*inde ab utero matris meae*) who greatly put her trust in you. You saw, Lord, how one day, when I was still a boy (*adhuc puer*), pressure on the chest suddenly made me hot with fever and almost at death's door. You saw, my God, because you were already my guardian, with what fervour of mind and with what faith (*qua fide*) I then begged for the baptism of your Christ, my God and Lord, urging it on the devotion of my mother and of the mother of us all, your Church. My physical mother was distraught. With a pure heart and faith in you she even more lovingly travailed in labour (*parturiebat*) for my eternal salvation. She hastily made arrangements for me to be initiated and washed in the protective rites (*sacramentis salutaribus initiarer et abluerer*), confessing you, Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins.

20 Augustine, *Conf.* 1, 9.14: "*Invenimus autem, domine, homines rogantes te et didicimus ab eis, sentientes te, ut operamus, esse magnum aliquem, qui posses etiam non apparens sensibus nostris exaudire nos et subvenire nobis. Nam puer coepi rogare te*" (Verheijen, CCL 27 (1981), 27; Chadwick (1991), 11).

21 The word is commonly used in *Conf.* I to refer to Augustine's *entourage*; O'Donnell, J.J., (1992), *Confessions*, 3 volumes: I. *Introduction and text*; II. *Commentary on books 1–8*; III. *Commentary on books 8–13* (Oxford), II, 62 notes that he may have simply observed others praying.

22 For considerations on the nature and extent of this oral instruction see Lane Fox (2015), 46–47.

But suddenly I recovered. My cleansing was deferred [...]. So I already believed (*credebam*), as did my mother and the entire household except for my father alone. Though he had not yet believed (*crediderat*), he did not obstruct my right to follow my mother's devotion, so as to prevent me believing in Christ (*credere*). She anxiously laboured to convince me that you, my God, were my father rather than he.<sup>23</sup>

The first sentence cannot be interpreted, as Dölger suggested, as a reference to private rituals of incorporation held by Monnica shortly after his birth, nor is it simply a blessing with salt against the Devil as stated by Brown and recently Lane Fox.<sup>24</sup> The references to the cross and salt are clear allusions to the rite of making new catechumens, which involved, as is known from Augustine himself in other instances—and from other contemporary sources—the central rite of signing the newly enrolled convert with the cross on the forehead and the giving of salt.<sup>25</sup> Mayer, followed by others, remarked that Augustine's use of the imperfect tense (*signabar*) may point to the regular repetition of the rite for catechumens, as I will further argue in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>26</sup> The fact that Augustine had learnt about eternal life relates well with the previous mention of men teaching him about God and Augustine links it here with

23 Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.17: "*Audieram enim ego adhuc puer de vita aeterna promissa nobis per humilitatem domini dei nostri descendit ad superbiam nostram et signabar iam signo crucis eius et condiebar eius sale iam inde ab utero matris meae, quae multum speravit in te. Vidisti, domine, cum adhuc puer essem et quodam die pressu stomachi repente aestuarem paene moriturus, vidisti, deus meus, quoniam custos meus iam eras, quo motu animi et qua fide baptismum Christi tui, dei et domini mei, flagitavi a pietate matris meae et matris omnium nostrum, ecclesiae tuae. Et conturbata mater carnis meae, quoniam et sempiternam salutem meam carius parturiebat corde casto in fide tua, iam curaret festinabunda, ut sacramentis salutaribus initiarer et abluerer, te, domine Iesu, confitens in remissionem peccatorum, nisi statim recreatus essem. dilata est itaque mundatio mea [...]* Ita iam credebam et illa et omnis domus, nisi pater solus, qui tamen non evicit in me ius maternae pietatis, quominus in Christum crederem, sicut ille nondum crediderat. nam illa satagebat, ut tu mihi pater esses, deus meus, potius quam ille" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 9–10; Chadwick (1991), 13–14 adapted).

24 Dölger, F.J., (1965–1966), 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens VIII', *JbAC* 8/9, 7–52, at 45; Brown (2000), 30; Lane Fox (2015), 38. For a well-argued refutation of Dölger see van Oort (1991), 28–30.

25 See Chapter 2, 1.2, pp. 102–117. Jerome received the same rite of signation in his youth, as he explains in his *Prologus in libro Iob de hebraeo translato*: "*quanto magis ego christianus, de parentibus christianis et vexillum crucis in mea fronte portans [...]*" (Gryson, R., et al., (1994), *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart), 732).

26 Mayer (1868), 65. Later, Busch (1938), 386; van der Meer (1961), 356; O'Donnell (1992), 11, 67; Harmless (2014), 91; Clark, G., (2015), *Monica: An Ordinary Saint* (Oxford), 132.

falling ill, twice situating the action when he was “still a boy (*adhuc puer*)”. The reference to God as a guardian (*custos*) recalls Augustine’s preaching to catechumens about the cross received on their foreheads as a sign of protection.<sup>27</sup> Augustine here clearly refers to his own trust (*qua fide*) and knowledge of God and eternal life, which he links to his initiative to be initiated because he feared death. His mother is distressed and makes sure that he is initiated, before he recovers.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Augustine presents himself as a believer in the Christian household, with only his father still not believing. The reference to faith (*credere*), which he shares with his household, does not seem to be casual, as suggested by O’Donnell, but highlights his status as a catechumen during his youth.<sup>29</sup> In his preaching, Augustine often refers to the fact that catechumens already believe in God, although they have not been baptised yet.<sup>30</sup>

The most puzzling element in this description of boyhood is that Augustine situates the rites of the catechumenate “at the time I came from my mother’s womb”, which, if taken literally, would mean right after birth. Most scholars indeed conclude that Augustine was initiated as a baby and that the mention of the rites is out of place in the narrative of boyhood.<sup>31</sup> O’Donnell follows the same assumption both in his detailed commentary of the *Confessiones* and in his biography of Augustine, as Busch and van Oort similarly do in their studies of Augustine’s catechumenate.<sup>32</sup> According to this view, after his initiation rapidly following birth, Augustine was instructed about Christianity during boyhood and then fell ill. An already mentioned passage in the sixth book of *Confessiones*, where Augustine also recalls his initiation as a catechumen saying that he received the name of Christ as an infant (*infans*) in the womb of the Church, would support such conclusions.<sup>33</sup> However, the ambiguity of the passages and other decisive clues favour an alternative scenario.

First, it is important to consider that the *Confessiones* are not intended to furnish a literal, descriptive and linear account of his initiation. The pas-

27 See for instance Augustine, *S.* 32, 12–13; *In. Ps.* 143, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 7.

28 For BeDuhn (2009), 23 n. 3, this postponement may result from Monnica’s background as a Donatist; I see no reason, however, to link Donatism to the postponement of baptism.

29 O’Donnell (1992), 11, 69.

30 In particular Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3; *S.* 97A (= *Bibl. cas.* 11, 114–115), 3.

31 Monachino (1947), 165; Botte, B., (1963), ‘Sacramentum catechumenorum’, *QL* 43, 322–330 at 324–325; Mandouze (1968), 84–85; de Latte (1976), 41; Nagel (1980), 114–118; Finn (1997), 215; Finn (1998), 151; Bonner (2002), 38; Pasquato (2006), 954; Chadwick (2009), 7; Wills (2012), 85; Harmless (2014), 91. Van der Meer (1961), 357 also implies it.

32 O’Donnell (1992), 11, 67; O’Donnell (2005), 53; Busch (1938), 386 and van Oort (1991), 27–28.

33 Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 4, 5: “*ecclesia unica, corpus unicus tui, in qua mihi nomen Christi infanti est inditum*” (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 77).

sages quoted are clearly shaped by a more complex resort to the family and its imagery: in the passage of the first book quoted above, the figures of the mother and of the Church are very closely linked, at times merging when they receive Augustine's request to be baptised and when it is said that Monnica labours to initiate him into Christianity.<sup>34</sup> In the afore-mentioned passage of the sixth book, Augustine discusses infancy in the Church with similar images to describe his "childish" anthropomorphic conceptions of God. He uses the language of birth to refer to his incorporation into the Church and the efforts of his mother in bringing him to initiation. One cannot fail to recognise Augustine's common resort to the imagery of pregnancy and birth with reference to the process of conversion through the catechumenate and baptism.<sup>35</sup> Thus, reading these passages about birth and infancy as a description of the ritual process of the catechumenate rather than as a reference to Augustine's own birth would better suit the passages, especially because Augustine situates the whole scene when he was a *puer*.

Augustine commonly followed the Roman traditional division in five ages (*infantia, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, gravitas*), while referring in a number of works to the six ages of mankind corresponding to the six days of creation, starting from the *De vera religione*.<sup>36</sup> This discrepancy, however, does not directly affect the issue here, since the uncertainty concerned the division of old age into two categories.<sup>37</sup> In the first book of the *Confessiones*, Augustine first discusses his *infantia*, which for him ended when children acquire speech, then the *pueritia* immediately following;<sup>38</sup> he later relates the beginning of *adulescentia* to puberty,<sup>39</sup> and finally notes at the beginning of the seventh book

34 There are frequent connections between Augustine's representation of his mother and of the Church, although the two figures never completely merge, see Bower, A.-M., (2007), 'Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ', in Stark, J.C., (ed.), (2007), *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* (University Park PA), 69–95 esp. 74–76.

35 See for instance a close association of mothers and the Church in Augustine, *S.* 293, 10; *S.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 4 and our discussion in Chapter 3, p. 155.

36 Augustine, *Vera rel.* 26, 48 (*infantia, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, senior pax, deterior aetas*).

37 See Eyben, E., (1973), 'Die Einteilung des menschlichen Lebens in römischen Altertum', *RhM* 116, 150–190, at 169 and O'Donnell (1992) 11, 52–56 with other references and bibliography on Augustine's theory of ages.

38 Augustine, *Conf.* 1, 8.13: "Nonne ab infantia huc pergens veni in pueritiam? Vel potius ipsa in me venit et successit infantiae? Nec discessit illa: quo enim abiit? Et tamen iam non erat. Non enim eram infans, qui non farer, sed iam puer loquens eram" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 27); a similar description of *infantes* in *Ep.* 187, 13–15.

39 Augustine, *Conf.* 11, 1.1: "Exarsi enim aliquando satiari inferis in adulescentia" and 3.6: "inquieta indutum adulescentia" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 18 and 20).

that, at thirty, he had just left *adulescentia* behind to enter *iuventus*.<sup>40</sup> This corresponds to the Roman tradition, both legal and literary, for which *infantia* ended at seven, when children lost their primary teeth and were considered old enough to speak for themselves,<sup>41</sup> while *adulescentia*, associated to sexual maturity, started at around fifteen and lasted often until thirty.<sup>42</sup>

A closer exploration of Augustine's references to the process of admission into the catechumenate shows that they all point to *pueritia*. In the general allusions about his religious upbringing explored earlier and often overlooked, Augustine says that he was incorporated into the Church as a *puer*, during his *pueritia* and as a *puerulus*.<sup>43</sup> The mention of a step (*gradus*) where he was placed as a *puer* in the sixth book of the *Confessiones*<sup>44</sup> corresponds to the entrance into the catechumenate, as highlighted by the similar use of the term in the *De fide et operibus* to refer to the catechumens' stage of initiation.<sup>45</sup> Augustine himself refers to the initiation of other boys: his own son Adeodatus was baptised at around fifteen and presented as a *puer*,<sup>46</sup> while he imagines Dinocrates, from the *Passio Perpetuae*, reciting the creed by himself and replying to baptismal interrogations at the age of seven.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Augustine's mention of his own fear of death and personal request to be baptised suggest that his description applies to a boy who is able to conceptualise such things. Therefore, it is most probable that Augustine's initiation took place during boyhood, which he situated between seven and puberty, around fifteen. In the second book of the *Confessiones*, Augustine describes himself as a catechumen, now *adulescens*, at sixteen, his father Patricius having recently become a catechumen.<sup>48</sup> It is unlikely that Augustine and Patricius became catechumens

40 Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 1.1: "*Iam mortua erat adulescentia mea mala et nefanda, et ibam in iuventutem*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 92).

41 See Knothe, H.G., (1982), 'Zur 7-Jahresgrenze der 'Infantia' im antiken römischen Recht', *Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris* 48, 239–256.

42 Eyben (1973), 150–190 for a synthesis, underlining that the frontier between *adulescentia* and *iuventus* is often imprecise.

43 Augustine, *Acad.* II, 2.5; *Duab. an.* 1, 1; *Util. cred.* 1, 2.

44 Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 11.18: "*Figam pedes in eo gradu, in quo puer a parentibus positus eram*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 86).

45 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6.9: "*Ad nomen Christi accedentes catechumenorum gradus excipiat*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 45).

46 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14: "*Adiunximus etiam nobis puerum Adeodatum*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 141).

47 Augustine, *An. or.* I, 10.12: "*Et ideo cum baptizantur, iam et symbolum reddunt et ipsi pro se ad interrogata respondent*"; III, 9.12: "*Dinocrates autem septennis puer, in quibus annis pueri cum baptizantur iam symbolum reddunt et pro se ipsi ad interrogata respondent*" (Urba-Zycha, *CSEL* 60 (1913), 312 and 370).

48 Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.6.

together because Augustine clearly says, as we have seen, that he was already believing when his father was not.<sup>49</sup> Thus, he became a catechumen before he was sixteen and before his father, and likely before he went to Madaura to study grammar at around twelve. All this evidence best places his initiation as a *puer* probably between the age of seven and twelve, thus between c. 361 and 366.

The precise sequence of events leading Augustine to enter the catechumenate and learn about Christianity is more difficult to establish. If we were to follow exactly the order of the *Confessiones* and to recognise the links in the imagery between the entrance into the catechumenate and the initiation during the illness it would mean that Augustine first received instruction on Christianity, then entered the catechumenate, perhaps when he fell ill. This scenario, which has received some support, is plausible, not least because it follows the chronology of the *Confessiones*.<sup>50</sup> However, it fails to explain the close links established between the knowledge acquired on Christianity and the initiation into the catechumenate. It seems more likely that his ritual initiation either preceded or corresponded to the time when he learnt about Christianity. According to Augustine's writings—particularly the *De catechizandis rudibus*—candidates, except those who were already learned, would hear the most about Christianity precisely when they entered the catechumenate, while the initiative to become a catechumen would have often been triggered by friends or relatives. Thus, Busch, although situating the initiation into the catechumenate shortly after birth, rightly compares Augustine's mention of instruction received as a boy with the process described in the *De catechizandis rudibus*.<sup>51</sup> I would argue that Augustine learnt about Christianity when he was made a catechumen and only fell ill later, still as a *puer*.<sup>52</sup> He maybe started to undergo rites which would have initiated him from the status of *catechumenus* to that of *fidelis*. These could be the protective rites (*sacramenta salutaria*) that were actively sought by his mother before he recovered. Strikingly again, at the end of the passage, the analogy between the physical parents and God and the Church is emphasised: Monnica joins the Church in an effort to bring Patricius to Christianity, and her son to have God as his true father.<sup>53</sup> This effort

49 Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.17.

50 Cf. Rietschel, G., (1909), *Lehrbuch der Liturgik* (Berlin), II, 8 quoted in Busch (1938), 386 n. 6.

51 Busch (1938), 386.

52 For this sequence of events, Madec (2001a), 22–23 although situating the initiation during early childhood.

53 For more on the relationships between Augustine and his parents in *Conf.* I, see Schultheiss, J., (2011), *Generationenbeziehungen in den Confessiones des Augustinus* (Stuttgart), 105–125.



seems to hint at the wish that he be fully initiated, since Augustine's imagery of the catechumenate precisely describes catechumens as potential sons of God, a status achieved with baptism.<sup>54</sup> The importance of baptism is indeed particularly underlined a few lines later, as the bishop deplores the decision to postpone his baptism in terms largely echoing his calls to baptism, particularly in sermons.<sup>55</sup>

The references analysed demonstrate the relevance of his Christian upbringing and at the same time Augustine's need to emphasise it from his earliest preserved works to the *Confessiones*. A number of reasons for this particular concentration may be evoked. The most compelling interpretation is to read these references within Augustine's use of his past as a protreptic: presenting his own past and conversion provides a plausible course of action for his Manichaean friends and readers that had still not converted.<sup>56</sup> Augustine aims to show how few excuses he had for not converting until his thirties, and, at the same time, to make clear to everyone that despite his hesitations and sins, he was compelled—as he says in the *Contra Academicos* almost unconsciously—to return to “true” Christianity. Theologically, for his baptised readers particularly, this insistence could be intended as a further tool to show that God, with the particular agency of his family, was guiding his life and would bring him to conversion. Thus, the images used convey the idea that Augustine's involvement in the Christian community of his town as a young boy had a fundamental impact on his later attraction to Manichaeism and then his return to Catholic Christianity in Milan. This heritage was quoted by Augustine as a young catechumen in Italy, and then became fundamental as a priest and bishop of Hippo both to refute accusers who doubted his Catholic Christian commitment and to inform and convince others to follow the path he traced.

The analysis of references to Augustine's initiation as a boy shows continuity, starting from 386 to the *Confessiones*, with progressively more emphasis on linking the initiations in Africa and Italy in the *De utilitate credendi* and particularly in the *Confessiones*, which serve as the culminating last words on his catechumenate in Africa. Donatists do not appear directly relevant, although Augustine's insistence on his African roots could echo accusations against his

54 For instance Augustine, S. 97A (= Bibl. cas. II, 114–115), 2–3 and S. 56, 4.5 on the Lord's Prayer.

55 Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.18. See more in Chapter 3.

56 On this see for instance: Feldmann (1994), 1157–1164; Feldmann, E., (1998), 'Das literarische Genus und das Gesamtkonzept der *Confessiones*', in Mayer, C., Fischer, N., (eds.), (1998), *Die Confessiones des Augustinus von Hippo. Einführung und Interpretation zu den dreizehn Bücher* (Freiburg), 11–59; Kotzé, A., (2004), *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden), esp. 52–66 and 117–216.

lack of ties with the African churches.<sup>57</sup> The polemical context behind these references is often elusive but seems to be mostly that of the fight against the Manichaeans: his incorporation into Christianity serves as the background to explain his later adhesion. This polemical context becomes much more apparent in Augustine's discussion of his time as a catechumen after this first initiation and later when he adhered to Manichaeism in Carthage.

## 2 Superstition, Deception and Failures: Falling into Manichaeism

Four sources inform us about Augustine's recollections of his *adulescentia*, before and after he became a Manichaean, again covering the same three key moments highlighted earlier: the *De beata vita* written in Cassiciacum; the *De utilitate credendi* (391–392), the *Confessiones* (397–403) and Sermon 51 (403). The *De beata vita* provides a first retrospective view on Augustine's adhesion to Manichaeism resulting from his dissatisfaction with the Christianity of his youth, the *De utilitate credendi* and the sermon developing the same ideas further. The *Confessiones*, on the other hand, present a more nuanced picture of Augustine's religious status before and at the time of adhesion to Manichaeism. I argue here that Augustine's status of catechumen implied a certain degree of familiarity, albeit somewhat superficial, with Christianity and the practice of Christian rites until his conversion to Manichaeism. Moreover, his status as a catechumen in Africa is viewed more negatively when he describes it in Cassiciacum in the period preceding his baptism, than in his later writings as a cleric. This seems again to suggest that Augustine progressively presented it differently. From these sources, it is also possible to address Augustine's appraisal of his attitude towards the Christianity of his youth during his time as a Mani-

57 For overviews on the Donatist schism and its controversies see: Frend, W.H.C., (1985), *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford); Lancel, S., 'Donatistae', *AL* 2, fasc. 3/4, 606–622; Lancel (1999b), 233–248; Shaw, B., *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2011), 162–194. Recent collections of articles: Miles, R., (ed.), (2016), *The Donatist Schism. Controversy and Contexts* (Liverpool); Dupont, A., Gaumer, M.A., Lamberigts, M. (eds.), (2015), *The Uniquely African Controversy: Studies on Donatist Christianity* (Leuven). On the origins of the controversy: Perrin, M.-Y., (2013), 'Costantino e la crisi donatista', in Melloni, A., (ed.), *Costantino 1. Enciclopedia costantiniana sulla figura e l'immagine dell'imperatore del cosiddetto editto di Milano, 312–2013*, volume 1 (Rome), 278–284 [[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/costantino-1-la-crisi-donatista\\_%28Enciclopedia-Costantiniana%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/costantino-1-la-crisi-donatista_%28Enciclopedia-Costantiniana%29/) consulted 26/1/2020]; Lizzi Testa, R., (2016), 'Il seme della divisione nella chiesa d'Africa: il movimento donatista', in Alzati, C., (ed.), (2016), *Africa / Ifrīqiya. Il Maghreb nella storia religiosa di Cristianesimo e Islam* (Vatican City), 153–178.

chaeae and the links between Christian catechumens and Manichaean hearers. Concerns resulting from the context of writing may shed new light on his account and illustrate that community boundaries were more fluid than generally thought.

## 2.1 *Leaving the Catechumenate Behind? Augustine's Adhesion to Manichaeism*

The adhesion to Manichaeism was viewed by Augustine as a way to go beyond the religious experience of his early youth but still remain faithful to Christ, the Manichaeans presenting themselves as his true followers.<sup>58</sup> In 386, in the *De beata vita*, Augustine the catechumen at Cassiciacum depicts himself, the young catechumen converting in Carthage in the 370s, as weak and strongly dissatisfied.<sup>59</sup> In an autobiographical narrative of what is often described as Augustine's first conversion—and which was to be developed in greater detail in the *Confessiones*—Augustine recalls how his quest for wisdom was triggered, at 19, by the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*.<sup>60</sup> However, he explains that his quest was hindered by a wrong and childish *superstitio*. He then progressively abandoned it when he encountered the Manichaeans, as he preferred hearing them teaching what to believe rather than simply accepting the religion of his youth as a command.<sup>61</sup> It seems most likely, because of the clear connection

58 Cf. Augustine, *Conf.* III, 6.10: "Itaque incidi in homines superbe delirantes, carnales nimis et loquaces, in quorum ore laquei diaboli et viscum confectum commixtione syllabarum nominis tui et domini Iesu Christi et paracleti consolatoris nostri spiritus sancti" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 31); *C. Faust.* XIII, 6; Decret (1978), I, esp. 270–273; Madec (2001a), 28–31. See van Oort (2011) for a recent overview with bibliography on Manichaeism and Augustine, and its links to Christianity. Besides the detailed studies of BeDuhn (2009, 2013), see more generally: Brown, P., (1969), 'The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire', *JRS* 59, 92–103; Decret, F., (1970), *Aspects du manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine. Les controverses de Fortunatus, Faustus et Felix avec saint Augustin* (Paris), esp. 272–300; Oort, J. van, 'Mani(chaeus)', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8 (2010), 1121–1132; Drecoll, V.H., (2010a), 'Manichaei', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8, 1132–1159. On Manichaeans and Catholic Christians both claiming that they are the true Christians see Perrin, M.-Y., (2018), 'Semichristiani et pseudochristiani', in *BA* 18A (2018), 389–392.

59 As noted in Courcelle (1968), 65.

60 See Courcelle, P., (1945), 'Les premières confessions de saint Augustin', *REL* 22 (1945), 155–174 reprinted in Courcelle (1968), 269–290.

61 Augustine, *Beata u.* 1, 4: "Ego ab usque undevicesimo anno aetatis meae, postquam in schola rhetoris librum illum Ciceronis, qui Hortensius vocatur, accepi, tanto amore philosophiae succensus sum, ut statim ad eam me ferre meditarer. [...] Nam et superstitio quaedam puerilis me ab ipsa inquisitione terreat et, ubi factus erectior, illam caliginem discipuli mihi persuasi docentibus potius quam iubentibus esse cedendum, incidi in homines, quibus lux ista, quae oculis cernitur, inter summa et divina colenda videretur" (Adam, *BT* 2022 (2017),

with Augustine's quest for wisdom and the conversion to Manichaeism, that the *superstitio* here refers to his young, irrational, and immature conception of religion. This reference to *superstitio* in the narrative of his conversion to Manichaeism is an interesting counterpart to the rediscovery of *religio* in the narrative of his return to the Catholic Church in Milan, described in the *Contra academicos*, also written in Cassiciacum.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that for the catechumen in Cassiciacum, his Christian upbringing was of little value at first, and actually caused him to fall into Manichaeism, before he was able to reclaim and reconsider it in a new light, progressively and almost inevitably, through the reading of the Platonic books. Augustine's strong statement is interesting since it does not fully match the milder appreciation of his Christian upbringing in later works.<sup>63</sup> References to his weakness and lack of expertise obviously can be interpreted as a fine justification for his conversion in his refutation of Manichaeism, but it can be fairly assumed that they also reflect true concerns and feelings of the young catechumen both in Carthage and in Cassiciacum.

Later in Africa, as a priest, at the beginning of the *De utilitate credendi* in the early 390s, Augustine further develops the narrative of his conversion to Manichaeism. He points out that Manichaeans imposed on him the need to reject superstition and adhere to beliefs and religious practices which are grounded in good reasoning.<sup>64</sup> However, Augustine does not say anymore that his understanding was superstitious but that the Manichaeans pretended that it was and deceived him:

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89). For a more detailed discussion of this conversion narrative see Catapano (2001), 186–195; for the broader biographical context, for instance Lancel (1999b), 52–62.

62 Compare Augustine *Beata u.* 1, 4 and *Acad.* 11, 2.5. For the interpretation here suggested, with bibliography, see notably O'Connell, R.J., (1986), 'On Augustine's "First Conversion". *Factus erectior* (De beata vita 4); *AugStud* 17, 15–29; Pizzolato, L.F., (1988), 'Il *De beata vita* o la possibile felicità nel tempo' in Reale, G., Pizzolato, L.F., Doignon, J., (eds.), *L'Opera letteraria di Agostino tra Cassiciacum e Milano: Agostino nelle terre di Ambrogio (1–4 ottobre 1986)* (Palermo), 31–112, at 58–59; Catapano (2001), 189. For an alternative interpretation of *superstitio* pointing to astrology and divination see Ferrari (1984), 35; Doignon, J., (1990), '*Factus erectior* (B. vita 1, 4). Une étape de l'évolution du jeune Augustin à Carthage', *Vet-era Christianorum* 27, 77–83. On the opposition between *superstitio* and *religio* see Kahlos (2007), 92–112.

63 The Manichaean Secundinus in his letter to Augustine similarly presents the Catholics as superstitious: "*sub eorum, quod peius est, nomine superstitiosis omnibus, id est catholici vocabuli dividens dignitatem*" (*Zycha*, *CSEL* 25/2 (1892), 897–898).

64 On this argument and the Manichaeans see Doignon, J., (1995), '*Docentibus esse cedendum* (Beat. Vit. 1,4): le jeune Augustin en quête d'une auctoritas', *Philologus* 139, 324–328; Hoffmann, A., (2001), 'Erst einsehen, dann glauben. Die nordafrikanischen Manichäer zwischen Erkenntnisanspruch, Glaubensforderung und Glaubenskritik', in Oort, J. van, Wermelinger, O., Wurst, G., (eds.), (2001), *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West* (Leiden-Boston-Cologne), 67–112.

What was it that for almost nine years drove me to disdain the religion that had been implanted on me as a child by my parents and to follow those people and listen attentively to them except that they said that we were held in fear by superstition (*superstitio*) and that faith was imposed on us before reason, whereas they did not put pressure on anyone to believe without first discussing and explaining the truth?<sup>65</sup>

This is a telling change of perspective. In the *De duabus animabus* written at the same period Augustine recalls how, after becoming a Manichaeism, he developed the habit of conducting religious debates which he particularly enjoyed winning, wrongly attributing his success to Manichaeism.<sup>66</sup> Resorting to his own experience to convince his friend Honoratus in the *De utilitate credendi*,<sup>67</sup> he particularly presents himself with criticism addressed not so much at his conceptions as at his attitude:

That is how they found me at that time, scornful of the “old wives tales” (*aniles fabulas*) and keen to have and to imbibe the open, uncontaminated truth that they promised. What considerations held me back, and kept me from fully committing myself to them, and made me stay at the stage (*illo gradu*) they called hearer, not yet putting aside the hopes and concerns of this world [...] What can I say about myself, already a Catholic Christian (*catholicus Christianus*) as I was at the time? That parched and almost overcome by prolonged thirst, crying and groaning I shook off those things and pushed them away, and that I have now returned avidly to that breast?<sup>68</sup>

65 Augustine, *Util. cred.* 1, 2: “*Quid enim me aliud cogeat annos fere nouem sprete religione, quae mihi puerulo a parentibus insita erat, homines illos sequi ac diligenter audire, nisi quod nos superstitione terreri et fidem nobis ante rationem imperari dicerent, se autem nulum premere ad fidem nisi prius discussa et enodata veritate?*” (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 4; Kearney, *WSA* 1/8 (2005), 117 adapted). This is also noted by Courcelle (1968), 65 n. 1.

66 Augustine, *Duab. an.* 9, 11.

67 On Honoratus: Decret (1978), 368–369. On his relationship with Augustine: Hoffmann (1997), 24–35.

68 Augustine, *Util. cred.* 1, 2: “*Qualem me tunc illi invenerunt, spernentem scilicet quasi aniles fabulas et ab eis promissum apertum et sincerum verum tenere atque haurire cupientem sed quae rursus ratio revocabat, ne apud eos penitus haererem, ut me in illo gradu quem vocant auditorum tenerem, ut huius mundi spem atque negotia non dimitterem [...] Sed de me quid dicam, qui iam catholicus christianus eram? Quae nunc ubera post longissimam sitim paene exhaustus atque aridus tota aviditate repetivi eaque altius flens et gemens concussi et expressi*” (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 4–5; Kearney, *WSA* 1/8 (2005), 117).

The *aniles fabulae* are best interpreted as a first echo to the education received from his mother and more generally to the critiques of the Manichaeans against Augustine in Carthage. This passage could be read as a defence against accusations of his deep involvement in the Manichaean community and it certainly is a polemical remark meant to question the truth offered by the Manichaeans. However, it also reproduces, by taking himself as an example, Augustine's negative appraisal of catechumens in general who fail to progress—both Christian catechumens and Manichaean hearers.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in the last part of the passage, Augustine remarkably calls himself a *catholicus Christianus* to refer to his status as a Christian catechumen, probably to better contrast it with a generic use of *Christianus* which could have been used to define him as a Manichaean, as it would have been the case with the term *catechumenus*. Indeed, in the Latin Manichaean *codex* from Tébessa, written in Africa in the fifth or sixth century, *catechumenus* is frequently used to refer to Manichaean hearers.<sup>70</sup> Augustine is writing to a Manichaean and is therefore careful to avoid the generic use of *catechumenus*. He presents himself in contrast to Honoratus, whom he perhaps met in Carthage during his studies: contrary to him, Augustine was already a Catholic Christian—catechumen—when he became a Manichaean and this is seen as the reason for his final renunciation of Manichaeism; he did not find the truth that he was looking for in Manichaeism and returned to the breast of the Church of his youth. In this description, Augustine, as a priest, rejects the idea that Christians follow superstitions and claims that the Manichaeans deceived him and would have easily deceived any other unexperienced young man looking for truth. He uses a clear and careful Church terminology (*catholicus, gradus, Christianus*), which again is closer to his developments in the *Confessiones* and aims at emphasising the limits of Manichaeism and the inevitable return to the Church of his youth.

Strikingly, as Courcelle noted, Augustine mentioned his conversion to Manichaeism, again insisting on the fact that he had been deceived (*aliquando deceptus*), in Sermon 51 probably preached in Carthage at the end of 403 or the very beginning of 404, therefore not long after the *Confessiones*, and clearly

69 This is often developed in Augustine's calls for baptism to catechumens, see Chapter 3.

70 Decret, F., (1989), 'Aspects de l'Église Manichéenne. Remarques sur le Manuscrit de Tébessa', in Zumkeller, A., (ed.), (1989a), *Signum Pietatis. Festgabe für Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg), 123–151; BeDuhn, J., Harrison, G., (1997), 'The Thebessa Codex: A Manichaean Treatise on Biblical Exegesis and Church Order', in Mirecki, P., BeDuhn, J., (eds.), (1997), *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources* (Leiden), 33–87; Stein, M., (2004), (ed.), *Manichaica Latina 3/1: Codex Thevestinus* (Paderborn).

to an audience that included catechumens.<sup>71</sup> Referring in particular to the two genealogies of Christ in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, he contrasted his audience, progressively taught about Christianity by the bishop, and his own proud and deceptive critical discussion of the Scriptures which brought him to Manichaeism:

Yes, brothers: have no qualms about believing, there's nothing you need be ashamed of. I am speaking to you as one who was myself caught out once upon a time (*aliquando deceptus*), when as a lad (*puer*) I wanted to tackle the divine scriptures with the techniques of clever disputation (*acumen discutiendi*) before bringing to them the spirit of earnest inquiry. In this way I was shutting the door of my Lord against myself by my misplaced attitude. [...] How much more fortunate are you people now! How serenely you learn; how safely you receive food, you who are still little ones in the nest of faith.<sup>72</sup>

Augustine was particularly attentive to teach catechumens what they needed to overcome such difficulties and avoid Manichaeism, precisely on the basis of his own difficult experience as a catechumen.

The *Confessiones* offer a broader, more detailed, and constructed narrative of this transition towards Manichaeism. This work does not only inform us on Augustine's situation at the time but makes it possible to follow Augustine's appraisal of his links with the Church of his youth both before and after adhering to Manichaeism. There are four main episodes referring to Augustine's initiation and attachment to Christianity: the return home at sixteen, the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*; the baptism and death of a Manichaean friend and the illness in Rome. These episodes are described as lost opportunities, failures of the young catechumen and then of the Manichaean hearer, unable to stay faithful to his Christian upbringing or even only to return to it.

After coming back home at sixteen following grammar school in Madaura, Augustine describes his parents' religious belonging:

71 Courcelle (1968), 60–67; Augustine, S. 51, 5,6 (for the date and place of preaching see Hombert (2000), 82 and 102; for further bibliography, Verbraken *et al.*, *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 5–6).

72 Augustine, S. 51, 5,6: "*Ita sit, fratres: secure creditis, non est unde erubescatis. Loquor vobis, aliquando deceptus; cum primo puer ad divinas scripturas ante vellem afferre acumen discutiendi quam pietatem quaerendi, ego ipse contra me perversis moribus claudebam ianuam domini mei [...]. Quanto vos beatiore modo! Quam securi discitis; quam tuti, qui adhuc parvuli estis in nido fidei, escam accipitis!*" (Verbraken *et al.*, *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 16–17; Hill, *WSA* 111/3 (1991), 24 adapted).

But in my mother's heart you had already begun (*inchoaveras*) your temple and the beginning of your holy habitation (cf. Eccles 24, 14). My father was still a catechumen (*catechuminus*) and had become that only recently. So she shook with a pious trepidation and a holy fear (2 Cor 7, 15). For, although I had not yet become a faithful (*quamvis mihi nondum fidei*), she feared the twisted paths along which walk those who *turn their backs and not their face towards you* (Jer 2, 27).<sup>73</sup>

This passage contrasts Patricius, Monnica and Augustine in interesting ways. Monnica could have been only recently baptised, as the insistence on the beginning of her commitment would show.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, in the next paragraph, Monnica is described as a *fidelis* for the first time.<sup>75</sup> If this is the case, her commitment could correspond to Patricius' entrance into the catechumenate. In this picture, Augustine, a catechumen, sees himself as leaning towards his father's inclinations. Situating Monnica's baptism when Augustine was a boy would well match with Augustine's admission into the catechumenate during boyhood.<sup>76</sup> The *parcours* of Augustine's parents may be therefore reconsidered: in this new picture, Patricius does not represent anymore the reluctant pagan among Christians as strongly as it seems at first sight when reading the first book of the *Confessiones*. Rather, we may imagine Monnica, a catechumen, and Patricius, a pagan, progressively adhering to Christianity as they raise children in the 360s, the mother receiving baptism and the father and son becoming catechumens, Patricius's initiation probably taking place a few years after

73 Augustine, *Conf.* 11, 3,6: "*Sed matris in pectore iam inchoaveras templum tuum et exordium sanctae habitationis tuae: nam ille adhuc catechumenus et hoc recens erat. Itaque illa exiliuit pia trepidatione ac tremore et quamvis mihi nondum fidei, timuit tamen vias distortas, in quibus ambulant qui ponunt ad te tergum et non faciem*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 20; Chadwick (1991), 27 adapted).

74 Despite Wright (1998), 9–12 who distinguishes Monnica's baptism from the commitment of her son and husband, and situates it earlier during adulthood (without any evidence however).

75 Augustine, *Conf.* 11, 3,7: "*Et cuius erant nisi tua verba illa per matrem meam, fidelem tuam, quae cantasti in aures meas?*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 20). See O'Donnell (1992), 11, 121–122 for the suggestion that Augustine is referring to Monnica's baptism. Clark (2015) provides a recent overview on Monnica, esp. 116–144 on religion; at 131 it is noted that Monnica may have been baptised older in age on the basis of *Conf.* 1X, 9,13, where Augustine tells that she sinned after baptism. For a critique of scholarly accounts of Monnica's baptism and a discussion comparing Monnica, Augustine and Patricius see Wright (1998).

76 In Augustine, *Conf.* 11, 3,6, he also refers to his entrance into *adulescentia* after leaving *pueritia* with the verb *induere*, maybe also to be related and opposed here to the conversion of the *iuvēnis* Augustine in the garden and the baptismal imagery of putting on Christ. Cf. Wills (2012), 110–111.



Augustine's. Monnica, on the other hand, must have become a catechumen earlier than Augustine, maybe in her youth.<sup>77</sup> The contrast between Monnica's fears and Augustine's status as a catechumen (*quamvis mihi nondum fidei*) also suggests that he and his household did not expect from him a full commitment to Christian habits.<sup>78</sup> As in the *De utilitate credendi*, Augustine says a little later in the *Confessiones* that he had no wish to hear the advice of his mother (*monitus muliebres*), who, for the bishop, was speaking with God's voice.<sup>79</sup> The critique reflects the emphasis of the bishop on the necessity for catechumens to commit to Christianity by following rules of behaviour, a major concern of Augustine's pastoral care of catechumens, as I will show in the next chapters.

Augustine's early adolescence was shaped by the belonging of his household to Christianity, as partial and distant as his personal commitment may have been. In Carthage, as he explains in the *Confessiones* and details in a sermon, Augustine regularly went to church, in particular vigils, although, as he later regrets, it was an occasion to flirt with women.<sup>80</sup> This behaviour is described shortly before the discovery of the *Hortensius*, which triggered Augustine's interest in wisdom. The episode, already discussed in the *De beata vita* in Cassiciacum, tells us more about how Augustine now viewed his time as a cat-

77 Perhaps in the Donatist community, before converting to the Catholic side, see O'Donnell (2005), 56 and 212–213 who notes that Augustine exchanged letters with a Donatist relative (*Ep.* 52); also Clark (2015), 137–139; Lane Fox (2015), 43. This hypothesis is plausible because of the Donatist background of Thagaste, see *Ep.* 93, 5.17. Frend (1985), 184 is against this hypothesis but notes that members of her household may have been Donatists.

78 Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.7–3.8.

79 Augustine, *Conf.* II, 3.7.

80 Augustine, *Conf.* III, 3.5: "*Ausus sum etiam in celebritate sollemnitatum tuarum intra parietes ecclesiae tuae concupiscere et agere negotium procurandi fructus mortis*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 29). While this text is only allusive, Augustine is much more precise in the sermon, evoking his experience of vigils in Carthage as a student and referring to the advances men made to women, see *S.* 359B (= Dolbeau 2), 5: "*Ego puer vigilans cum studerem in hac civitate, sic vigilavi feminis permixtis improbitatibus masculorum, ubi forte et castitatem temptabat occasio. Quam nunc honeste vigilatur, quam caste, quam sancte!*" (Dolbeau (2009), 330); this text also suggests that since then Aurelius had enforced the separation of sexes in churches (see also *Ciu.* 11, 28 about separate entrances). Nevertheless, there is no archaeological evidence supporting the idea that this separation was materially enforced and widespread in Africa (see Duval, N., (1998), 'Commentaire topographique et archéologique de sept dossiers des nouveaux sermons', in Madec (1998), 171–214, at 190–193). Further discussion and bibliography on *S.* 359B in Ciccolini, *BA* 77A (forthcoming). Pace Oort, J. van, (2018b), 'Sin and Concupiscence in Augustine's *Confessions*: An Analytical Overview of the Relevant Texts and Some Conclusions', *Augustiniana* 68, 193–207 esp. 198, for whom there is a homoerotic phase in Augustine and *Conf.* III, 3.5 would refer to homoerotic flirting.

echumen in Carthage and the steps leading to the adhesion to Manichaeism. For Augustine, the reading changed his prayers, however the name of Christ was missing:

This name, *by your mercy Lord* (Ps 24, 7), this name of my Saviour your Son, my infant heart had piously drunk in with my mother's milk, and at a deep level I retained the memory (*pie biberat et alte retinebat*). Any book which lacked this name, however well written or polished or true, could not entirely grip me.<sup>81</sup>

Again, Augustine recalls his Christian belonging as a youth (now at nineteen): he prays and trusts Christ's name above any other. The emphasis on infancy recalls the description of his Christian childhood in the first book, again to show his strong attachment to Christ. Augustine's depiction of himself very closely resembles how he portrays catechumens in his preaching, trusting and strongly revering the name of Christ above anything else.<sup>82</sup> Augustine's insistence on the significance of Christ in his youth, which was absent from the account of the *De beata vita*, written in 386, reflects new concerns. As a bishop, he employed his own experience to have an impact on catechumens potentially reading his work who might be in a similar situation of uncertainty about their religious belonging; more broadly, he strengthened the narrative of his conversion to Christianity as a return to the religion of his youth. Moreover, the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* and the need to find a way to combine his reverence for Christ with his quest for truth is related to the subsequent examination of the Bible.<sup>83</sup> This very fact shows that, despite his attachment to Christ, Augustine probably only had a superficial knowledge of the Bible. However, this should not lead us to conclude with BeDuhn that his Christian upbringing "made little impression on him".<sup>84</sup> The depth of his knowledge of the Bible is not a comprehensive factor to assess Augustine's Christian belonging. On the contrary, it should be underlined that, as Augustine tells us, in his quest for truth, his religious upbringing played a fundamental role: either, as he suggests

81 Augustine, *Conf.* III, 4.8: "*Quod nomen Christi non erat ibi, quoniam hoc nomen secundum misericordiam tuam, domine (Ps 24, 7), hoc nomen salvatoris mei, filii tui, in ipso adhuc lacte matris tenerum cor meum pie biberat et alte retinebat, et quidquid sine hoc nomine fuisset quamvis litteratum et expolitum et veridicum non me totum rapiebat*" (Verheijen, CCSL 27 (1981), 30; Chadwick (1991), 40).

82 See for instance Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3; more in Chapter 2, pp. 125–127.

83 Augustine, *Conf.* III, 5.9.

84 BeDuhn (2009), 25. Against this view: van Oort (1991), 25–30; Madec (2001a), 23–32.

in the *De beata vita*, when it held him back, or, as suggested in the *Confessiones*, when it brought him only to adhere to books discussing truth and Christ together. Augustine admits that, as a catechumen, he had at first concerned himself only marginally with the Bible, but he also notes that he resorted to it when looking for truth. Clearly, any of his intellectual developments were taking place within Christianity. Despite his superficial knowledge, Augustine must have known that in the Bible Christ was central and the source of truth for Christians. It could also be argued that looking at the Bible was recommended to him directly by some other Christians or that he simply followed their example. There is no reason to mistrust Augustine's statement that he tried to read the Bible after a desire to combine his devotion for Christ with his quest for truth: his status as a catechumen and his attendance to Church would have naturally brought him to do so.<sup>85</sup>

At the same time, retrospectively, the bishop is well aware of the limits of the biblical text when it is read without help and he advises humility and guidance from trustworthy clerics.<sup>86</sup> His own account in the *Confessiones* is aimed at showing the difficulties faced by converts when they are introduced to the Bible. The near contemporary *De catechizandis rudibus* reflected the same concerns, as Augustine provided model speeches for newcomers aiming at providing an easier and more attractive introduction to the Bible, especially for educated individuals.<sup>87</sup> In the *De utilitate credendi* already, Augustine precisely criticises reading without a skilled adviser, something which nobody would do when reading poetry, he argues. To Honoratus, with a clear reference to Ambrose, Augustine recommends looking for a master, even if it requires crossing the sea.<sup>88</sup> Again, his own experience is an example for others and a clear inspiration for his literary work and pastoral activities. The unadvised reading of the young catechumen in Carthage led him to dismiss the Bible and adhere to Manichaeism to satisfy his desire for truth.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, the *Confessiones* present Augustine's attitude in Carthage and his adhesion to Manichaeism in a more nuanced light compared to the *De beata vita*, matching and maybe even exceeding the mildness of the *De utilitate credendi*. Although he criticises his behaviour, Augustine prefers to insist, not on

85 On this, Madec (2001a), 23–32 against BeDuhn (2009), 33 who reads it as a purely retrospective reconstruction.

86 Augustine, *Conf.* III, 5.9. In *Conf.* III, 12.21, in contrast, Augustine recalls how an African bishop foretold Monnica that Augustine would abandon Manichaeism after reading on his own. But this was not referring to the Scriptures but to Manichaean books.

87 On this work and the first catechesis, see Chapter 2, pp. 90–95.

88 Augustine, *Util. cred.* 7.17.

89 Augustine, *Conf.* III, 5.9–6.10.

his *superstitio* and lack of understanding, but on the fact that he was deceived and lost the opportunity of confirming and reinforcing the Christianity of his youth after reading the *Hortensius*. He firmly relates his search for truth with Christian devotion as a catechumen and presents the resort to the Bible as natural. Even the adhesion to Manichaeism is the result of his longing for Christ.

## 2.2 *Augustine the Manichaean and Baptism*

Two other episodes in the *Confessiones* that have not been explored in scholarship on Augustine's catechumenate deserve particular attention, as they illuminate Augustine's views on Christian initiation as a Manichaean. The first is the narrative of the baptism of his dying and most dear friend. Augustine tells us that at the time he saw baptism as a farce, which only touched the body but not the soul. His friend, after temporarily recovering, took baptism very seriously, however Augustine hoped to convince him to reject it, since he was himself responsible for the conversion of his friend to Manichaeism in the first place.<sup>90</sup> The baptism of Augustine's friend most likely implies that he shared Augustine's upbringing in the local Catholic Church and was probably a catechumen when he adhered to Manichaeism, as it was the case of Cornelius, Augustine's friend who may be identified with Romanianus and who also received baptism in emergency—Honoratus is probably also a catechumen when Augustine sends him the *Liber de gratia novi testamenti* (= *Ep.* 140).<sup>91</sup> While Augustine probably did not intend to highlight this fact, it shows how porous religious affiliations were for these men, and Augustine likely saw himself in his dying friend. Their membership as catechumens in the Catholic Church and the role of the household in asking for baptism makes clear that they were still able to easily complete their initiation in the Church of their youth even after converting to Manichaeism. The same could have indeed happened to Augustine.

The second baptismal episode takes place in Rome when Augustine, after leaving his mother behind, fell severely ill. The description of Augustine's state of mind is revealing of how he considered himself, both at the time of the illness

90 Augustine, *Conf.* IV, 4.8: "Nam recreatus est et salvus factus, statimque, ut primo cum eo loqui potui—potui autem mox, ut ille potuit, quando non discedebam et nimis pendebamus ex invicem temptavi apud illum inridere, tamquam et illo inrisuro mecum baptismum, quem acceperat mente atque sensu absentissimus. Sed tamen iam se accepisse didicerat. At ille ita me exhorruit ut inimicum admonuitque mirabili et repentina libertate, ut, si amicus esse vellem, talia sibi dicere desinerem" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 43).

91 Augustine, *Ep.* 259, 3, see Gabillon, A., (1978), 'Romanianus alias Cornelius: Du nouveau sur le bienfaiteur et l'ami de saint Augustin', *REAug* 24, 58–70; *Ep.* 140, 19. 48.

and at the moment of recalling the episode. Augustine did not ask for baptism. For the bishop his rejection means that he would have gone into fire and torments after death. The description is particularly interesting because it contains the bishop's appreciation of his Christian background as a Manichaean. Augustine compares his past experiences with these words: "I did better as a boy when I begged for it from my devout mother".<sup>92</sup> In the same passage, Augustine alludes to the fact that he had not yet been forgiven for any of his sins because he had not been baptised ("*non enim quicquam eorum mihi donaveras*") but adds that even the cross had not freed him from the enmity (*inimicitia*) of God.<sup>93</sup> This could well refer to the cross put on the forehead of catechumens when they entered the catechumenate and which was seen as a powerful apotropaic rite. Augustine's preaching often refers to the power of the cross on the forehead and to its significance to protect Christians.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, Augustine means that he had lost the only protection and blessing he had received by becoming a catechumen. This is related to faith (*credideram*) as it had been the case when Augustine asked for baptism as a boy: now he could not adhere to the incarnation and crucifixion and therefore the cross was of no help to him. He incurred the *inimicitia* of God because he was a Manichaean. His reaction corresponds to his rejection of his dying friend's baptism.<sup>95</sup> According to these two episodes on baptism, therefore, Augustine suggests that, as a Manichaean, he had fully renounced his status as a catechumen in the Catholic Church. The bishop underlines that this was a regression from childhood and that his friend was better than him.

The three sources explored in this section show that Augustine progressively reassessed his Christian *adulescentia* and adhesion to Manichaeism. In the *De beata vita*, he emphasised the weakness of his understanding of Christianity in Carthage and his logical adhesion to Manichaeism. In the *De utilitate credendi*, he had a milder appreciation, accusing the Manichaeans of deceiving him instead. The precision of vocabulary in terms of Church hierarchy well exemplifies Augustine's transition from his time in Cassiciacum: now as a priest he would use his own past in anti-Manichaean polemics aimed at refut-

92 Augustine, *Conf.* v, 9.16: "*Melior eram puer, quo illum de materna pietate flagitavi*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 66; Chadwick (1991), 83).

93 Augustine *Conf.* v, 9.16 (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 66). For this language of forgiving see *S.* 216, 5 (to candidates for baptism), quoted by O'Donnell (1992), 11, 311.

94 See Augustine, *S.* 342, 1: "*Est ergo hoc signum quod in fronte gestamus, signum quo salvi sumus*" (*PL* 39, (1841), 1501; *C. Faust.* xii, 30; *In Ps.* 48, 11, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2 etc. For a detailed discussion: Pignot, M., (2019), 'Ritual Performance and Christian Belonging: Signing Foreheads with the Cross in the Writings of Augustine of Hippo', *SEJG* 58, 111–143.

95 Mandouze (1968), 85 n. 3.

ing Manichaeism and converting his friend. The *Confessiones* similarly resort to Augustine's past to refute opponents and exhort them to conversion, however they develop a more elaborate narrative, offering a peculiar picture of the young Augustine's attachment to his Christian initiation before and after adhering to Manichaeism. The Christian background is strongly emphasised: Augustine is a young catechumen in a Christian household where initiation becomes increasingly relevant, his parents both taking steps to integrate more fully into the local Christian community. Beyond his retrospective critiques, evidence suggests that he followed their path. In Carthage, Augustine goes to church and, when reading the *Hortensius*, turns to the Bible for answers. The *Confessiones* thus offer the most reconciled view on Augustine's Christian upbringing. Similar leniency is displayed in the *Contra Cresconium*, written against the Donatist grammarian probably between 405 and 407 after the laws of Honorius against rebaptism, when Augustine notes that he converted to Manichaeism as an "*adulescens laicus catechumenus*", which he sees as much less condemnable than a Catholic bishop becoming a Donatist.<sup>96</sup>

This progressively more positive narrative of his own Christian upbringing can be explained both on the ground of the different genre of the works in which it is discussed, and of his new concerns as a cleric in Hippo. The three texts, however, have in common the use of his past to exhort readers to follow him on his journey towards the truth. Augustine is convinced that his example can be fruitfully exploited to persuade friends, many of whom shared his background. The real break happens with the description of his attitude toward the religion of his youth during his time as a Manichaean, an aspect only considered in the *Confessiones*, which focus on his lack of involvement. As a Manichaean, he failed twice to reclaim his youth through baptism, remaining instead fully committed to Manichaeism. Augustine's presentation both shows that he remained within range of coming back to the Christianity of his youth and that, as a Manichaean, he failed to reconnect with it.

Behind these contrasting descriptions, however, some concrete ground seems to emerge: Augustine was involved in Christian communities both in Thagaste and in Carthage and tried to perfect his knowledge through the reading of the Bible, although this remained superficial; then he was attracted to Manichaeism and committed to it seriously. As a hearer, it is likely that he read

96 Augustine, *C. Cresc.* IV, 64.79 (Petchenig, M., *CSEL* 52/2 (1909), 578). Augustine refutes Cresconius' reply to his first book against the letters of Petilianus. See De Veer, A.C., *BA* 31 (1968), 9–67 and 741–830; Moreau, M., (1996), 'Cresconius grammaticum partis Donati (Ad –)', *AL* 2, fasc. 1/2, 131–137; Lancel (1999b), 395–397.

Manichaean books widely and was involved in regular religious meetings.<sup>97</sup> The evidence about his friend suggests that, despite this commitment, receiving baptism was probably not a completely remote possibility, although perhaps more likely in Africa, where his household and friends resided, than in Rome. Moreover, the distance put by Augustine between his past Catholic Christianity and his time as a Manichaean has also to be related to the polemical tone used against Manichaeans in describing his Roman illness. Augustine generally wanted to emphasise the distance between Manichaeans and Nicene Christians. This is made particularly clear in a passage of the *Contra litteras Petiliani*, a work made of three books, the first refuting a first letter of the Donatist Petilianus of Cirta, the second providing a more detailed refutation of the letter in the form of a dialogue, before the final refutation of Petilianus' reply to Augustine's first refutation, probably finished between 402 and 405.<sup>98</sup> In the third book, Augustine responds to accusations against himself and other converts to Manichaeism, suggesting that he was baptised as a Manichaean, by underlining that Manichaean hearers are never supposed to receive baptism:

Let him say or write what he pleases concerning their baptism,—not knowing, or pretending not to know, that the name of catechumen (*catechumeni*) is not bestowed among them upon persons to denote that they are at some future time to be baptised, but that this name is given to such as are also called hearers, on the supposition that they cannot observe what are considered the higher and greater commandments, which are observed by those whom they think right to distinguish and honor by the name of Elect (*electi*).<sup>99</sup>

97 Cf. O'Donnell (2005), 49. On Augustine's readings as a hearer I agree with Oort, J. van, (2008), 'The Young Augustine's Knowledge of Manichaeism', *VChr* 62/5, 441–466 revised and updated in Oort, J. van, (2019), *Augustine and Mani. Collected essays on Mani, Manichaeism and Augustine* (Leiden-Boston), chapter 12; Oort, J. van, (2012), 'Augustine and the Books of the Manichaeans', in Vessey (2012), 188–199. Others have argued that Augustine mostly read such books only later, see for instance Coyle, J.K., (2001), 'What Did Augustine Know about Manichaeism When He Wrote His Two Treatises "De moribus"?', in van Oort-Wermelinger-Wurst (2001), 43–56 reprinted in Coyle, J.K., (2009), *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (Leiden-Boston), 251–263; BeDuhn (2009), 42–105.

98 See Lancel (1999b), 393; Hombert (2000), 189–193; Dodaro, R., 'Litteras Petiliani (Contra –)', *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8 (2010), 1030–1035.

99 Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* 111, 17.20: "Quod ei placet de illorum baptismo dicat et scribat, nesciens aut nescire se fingens non illic ita appellari catechumenos, tamquam eis baptismus quandoque debeatur, sed eos hoc vocari, qui etiam auditores vocantur, quod videlicet tamquam meliora et maiora praecepta observare non possunt, quae observantur ab eis, quos electorum nomine discernendos et honorandos putant" (Petschenig, M., *CSEL* 52 (1909), 178; King, J.R.,

Baptism was indeed already rejected in early Manichaean sources and Augustine's emphasis on his refusal of baptism in the *Confessiones* may have been intended to show that baptism had nothing to do with Manichaeism, where the sacred seals provided an alternative means of purification.<sup>100</sup> Presenting himself renouncing baptism as a Manichaean in Africa and in Rome refuted the Donatists who accused him of having been baptised in Italy as a Manichaean.

More broadly, it was certainly important for the bishop Augustine to distinguish between catechumens in his community and Manichaean hearers—since they shared many features—as the porous religious affiliations of his friends show, and contrary to the rigid distinctions of the *Confessiones*. Christians and Manichaeans both claimed to be the only true Christians, and they similarly distinguished two stages of initiation, sharing the same vocabulary of *catechumenus* for the first stage, while for the second stage they used *fidelis* and *electus* respectively. *Electus* however, was used by Christians in Italy—as it is attested in Ambrose and Leo the Great—to refer to the catechumens preparing for baptism.<sup>101</sup> Revealingly, Augustine never used such a term, preferring *competens* instead.<sup>102</sup> Both Christians and Manichaeans employed the term *gradus* to refer to these stages—the *codex* of Tébéssa, like Augustine's *De fide et operibus*, refers to the *gradus catechumenorum*.<sup>103</sup> Although Manichaean initiation rites remain little known for now, it is very likely that the session to make new catechumens in Augustine's community and the rite to make new hearers in Manichaean communities both involved specific questions to the candidate and a catechesis on the core principles of the religion to which the candidate had to agree, ending with the imposition of the right hand and a ritual of con-

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revised by Hartranft, C.D., *NPNF* 4 (1887) revised and edited for New Advent by Knight, K., <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/14093.htm>).

100 See Stroumsa, G., (2011), 'Purification and its Discontents. Mani's Rejection of Baptism', in North, J.A., Price, S.R.F., (eds.), (2011), *The Religious History of the Roman Empire. Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Oxford), 460–478.

101 Ambrose, *De Helia et ieiunio* 10, 34: "Venit iam dies resurrectionis baptizantur electi" (Schenkl, *CSEL* 32/2 (1897), 430); Leo the Great, *Ep.* 16, 6: "In baptizandis electis, qui secundum apostolicam regulam et exorcismis scrutandi, et jejuniis sanctificandi, et frequentibus sunt praedicationibus imbuendi" (*PL* 54 (1846), 702).

102 See Augustine, *Cur. mort.* 12, 15; *Ep.* 258, 5; *F. et op.* 6, 9; *S.* 5, 3; 216, 1; 228, 1; 352, 1.6, 2.7; 392, 2 etc.

103 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9; for the Tébéssa *codex* see Decret (1989), 37–38. *Gradus* is also employed in Augustine, *Mor.* 11, 18.65 written in 388 to refer to the Manichaean hearers. On the two stages in Manichaeism: BeDuhn, J., (2000), *The Manichaean Body. In Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore), 25–68.



signation of the candidates.<sup>104</sup> A more thorough comparison of their practices on a larger scale could yield interesting results. Christians and Manichaeans shared a similar approach to religious initiation, with the development—for converts—of a peculiar religious posture of distant and partial adherence, temporary and intermediary belonging. It may be an overstatement to state, with Ferrari, that Augustine could not abandon the religion of his youth and would have necessarily kept attending Christian churches and presenting himself as a catechumen while he was a Manichaean.<sup>105</sup> However, his religious belonging certainly implied flexibility and meant that change was easier, as it was the case twice for Augustine, first when he became a Manichaean, and then when he renounced Manichaeism.

### 3 The Return: Milan and Cassiciacum

After the Roman illness, Augustine's appraisal of the Catholic Church, and of his involvement in it, is only known to us through his recollections of his stay in Milan. At some point, difficult to determine, after arriving in Milan in 384, Augustine reintegrated the rank of catechumens in the Catholic community, possibly with Monnica as a sponsor. This period ends with his famous conversion and the decision to leave for Cassiciacum at the end of the summer 386. While his experience during these years is best known through the *Confessiones*, he also recalled it in a number of other sources: first in the *Contra academicos* written in Cassiciacum, then in the *De utilitate credendi* (391–392)

104 See Puech, H.-Ch., (1979), *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais* (Paris), 319–360, esp. 354, 360; 374–375; BeDuhn (2009), 36–42 for an number of hypotheses on these rites. On the imposition of the right hand see Oort, J. van, (2018a), 'Manichaean Imagery of Christ as God's Right Hand', *Vigiliae Christianae* 72, 184–205 esp. 196. Van Oort notably refers to *Kephalaia* xc–xc1 (Böhlig, A., (ed.), *Kephalaia*, Volume 1, 1, *Manichäische Handschriften der Staatlichen Museen Berlin* (Stuttgart, 1940), 226; Gardner, I., (1995), *The Kephalaia of the Teacher. The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary* (Leiden-New York-Cologne), 234): "Happen you know that from the first day when he left the former error behind, wherein he was, and he received the right hand of [p]eace and trusted and became established in the rank of the true catechumenate"; Augustine, *Ep.* 236, 2 also mentions the rite being performed by Manichaean elects on hearers. New evidence on Manichaean catechesis in the Chester Beatty Kephalaia codex is being edited. See BeDuhn, J.D., Dilley, P., Gardner, I., (eds.), (2015), *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex* (Leiden-Boston) for preliminary studies.

105 Ferrari, L.C., (1995), 'Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee [sic]', *AugStud* 26, 109–128. Also: Chadwick, H., (2003), 'Self-justification in Augustine's Confessions', *EHR* 118, 1160–1175, at 1163.

and finally in two letters, uncertainly dated respectively to 395–396 and 400.<sup>106</sup> Again, most recollections precede the climax of the narrative reached in the *Confessiones*. In these key texts, Augustine is consistent in connecting his initiation in Africa to his reintegration into the Church of Milan, while when he writes as a priest and bishop he sets this process more specifically in a liturgical context. Although employed to demonstrate the inevitability of his conversion, this evidence corroborates the continuity of Augustine's experience, the progress towards baptism being intimately connected to his time as a catechumen in Africa.

### 3.1 *Augustine's Return to the Status of Catechumen*

The passages of the *Contra academicos*, the *De utilitate credendi* and the *Confessiones* describing Augustine's reintegration of the rank of catechumens in Milan always connect this decision to Augustine's admission into the catechumenate in Africa through his parents—which was described using the imagery of planting, as we have seen. The passage of the *Contra academicos* discussed above is thus not only relevant to highlight how Augustine described his African religious background, but also sheds light on Augustine's return to the catechumenate in Milan. Indeed, Augustine explained that after reading the Platonic books he looked “in passing (*de itinere*)” at the religion of his youth, which attracted him, and decided to read Paul to find answers.<sup>107</sup> Although scholarship has often dwelled on his lack of interest in Christianity, it is remarkable that in 386 Augustine the catechumen in Cassiciacum, recalling events happening only a few months earlier, already presented his conversion as a return, almost inevitable but with new insights, to the religion of his youth. The later similar recollections of Augustine's return to the catechumenate in the *De utilitate credendi* and in the *Confessiones* are not therefore mere retrospective reconstructions of events long gone. At the very least, they are consistent with Augustine's position at the end of 386.<sup>108</sup> This said, these later works display a

106 To this one may add one short passage in Augustine, *Quant. an.* 34.77, written around 388, pointing to teaching received in the Catholic Church on the soul, possibly to be related to Ambrose's teaching, although no details are provided: “*Ideoque divine ac singulariter in ecclesia catholica traditur nullam creaturam colendam esse animae—libentius enim loquor his verbis, quibus mihi haec insinuata sunt*” (Hörmann, *CSEL* 89 (1986), 225). On the treatise, see Lütcke, K.-H., (1986), ‘*Animae quantitate* (De –)’, *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 350–356. For Harmless (2014), 110–111 it may refer to Ambrose's explanation of the creed.

107 Augustine, *Acad.* 11, 2.5.

108 See the overviews of the debate on the contrast between the dialogues and the *Confessiones* in Madec (1989); Ries (2005).

change of emphasis with the use of much more specific Church terminology to refer to his youth as a catechumen, corresponding to specific aims.

In the *De utilitate credendi* Augustine provides the first autobiographical account, from his adhesion to Manichaeism to his conversion in Milan, making of his journey an example to be imitated by Honoratus. Upon his arrival in Italy, Augustine was undecided and favoured the scepticism of Academics, before gaining some new hope as he heard the preaching of Ambrose in Milan. He therefore decided to be a catechumen (*catechumenus*) in the Church of Milan, which he identifies with the Church of his youth, waiting to find the truth.<sup>109</sup> Augustine seems therefore to recommend to Honoratus to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church, where he would be able to hear preaching and progressively integrate Christianity more fully. For the first time, Augustine referred to his initiation with the technical term of *catechumenus* and fully associated his status as catechumen in Milan with his initiation in Africa before he adhered to Manichaeism. A very similar view is held against Fortunatus in the summer of 392, when Augustine, as van Oort has pointed out, explicitly says that he “returned” to the Catholic faith after abandoning Manichaeism.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, in contrast to the *Contra academicos*, and again because of the new concerns of the cleric, Augustine aimed to show to readers that the Church of his youth was in no way different from the Church of Ambrose and that he was able to easily reintegrate into it in Milan. In doing so, he opened the door for individuals like him. At the same time, he presented continuity in his Church membership against Africans who might have failed to see how to become a catechumen in Thagaste as a boy and in Ambrose’s Church in his thirties could have been the same. These Africans could be the Donatists, but also, more broadly, Christians who questioned his religious background.

The *Confessiones* offer a very similar picture, although much more elaborate and better known. In his account, Augustine takes the same elements of the *De utilitate credendi* but sketches a more progressive transformation of his own self, from the crossing of the sea to reach Rome to his arrival in Milan. In the fifth book, the bishop describes the dangerous crossing of the sea and the parting with Monnica using clear baptismal imagery: “Even this you forgave me, mercifully saving me from the waters of the sea, when I was full of abom-

109 Augustine, *Util. cred.* 8, 20: “Decreveramque tamdiu esse catechumenus in ecclesia, cui traditus a parentibus eram, donec aut invenirem, quod vellem, aut mihi persuaderem non esse quaerendum” (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 25).

110 Augustine, *C. Fort.* 37: “et inde fuisse admonitum divinitus, ut illum errorem relinquerem et ad fidem catholicam me converterem vel potius revocarem ipsius indulgentia, qui me huic fallaciae semper inhaerere non sivit” (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 112); van Oort (1991), 25–30.

inable filth, so as to bring me to the water of your grace. This water was to wash me clean, and to dry the rivers flowing from my mother's eyes".<sup>111</sup> Monnica's suffering figures again, as when he was a boy, his future spiritual birth in the Church. Thus, retrospectively, Augustine tells God and the reader that this journey had the purpose of fulfilling his initiation into Christianity begun in Africa and bring him to the baptism so desired by his mother. This thread is followed at the end of the fifth book, when Augustine recalls his doubts in Italy after losing interest in Manichaeism and falling into scepticism, and refers, as in the *De utilitate credendi*, to the decision to become a catechumen in the Church of Milan after hearing the preaching of Ambrose, again using the technical term of *catechumenus*.<sup>112</sup> Augustine famously explains that he first attended the sermons only to get a sense of Ambrose's fame and eloquence, but that progressively he was impressed by the content of his sermons, which resorted to allegorical readings of biblical episodes. This was a decisive development enabling him to read the Bible in a new perspective, cast away his former Manichaean conceptions, and pave the way for his conversion.<sup>113</sup> It is clear, as noted by Harmless, that the decision to integrate the ranks of catechumens in Milan is an important and often little-noticed step of Augustine's conversion journey.<sup>114</sup>

At the beginning of the sixth book, this significant change is discussed and Augustine presented attending church every Sunday and reconsidering his former preconceptions about Christianity.<sup>115</sup> Church terminology is again used in the middle of the sixth book to state in a somewhat anachronistic way that he decided to be a catechumen (*gradus; positus*).<sup>116</sup> Augustine's choice to become a catechumen is an important moment in the *Confessiones*: it stresses Augustine's return, almost reducing his Manichaean past to a parenthesis. This

111 Augustine, *Conf.* v, 8.15: "*quia hoc dimisisti mihi misericorditer servans me ab aquis maris plenum execrandis sordibus usque ad aquam gratiae tuae, qua me abluto siccarentur flumina maternorum oculorum*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 65; Chadwick (1991), 81). On the vergilian background of this narrative: Bennett, C., (1988), 'The conversion of Vergil: the *Aeneid* in Augustine's *Confessions*', *REAug* 34, 47–69, esp. 61–66.

112 Augustine, *Conf.* v, 14.24–25. On his relationship with Ambrose: Biffi, G., (1987), 'Conversione di Agostino e vita di una chiesa', in Caprioli, A., Vaccaro, L., (eds.), (1987), *Agostino e la conversione cristiana* (Palermo), 23–34.

113 Augustine, *Conf.* v, 13.23–14.25. On the significance of Ambrose's preaching for Augustine as a catechumen see the overview in Harmless (2014), 96–105.

114 Harmless (2014), 104.

115 Augustine, *Conf.* vi, 3.4: "*Et eum quidem in populo verbum veritatis recte tractantem (2 Tm 1, 15) omni die dominico audiebam, et magis magisque mihi confirmabatur omnes verutarum calumniarum nodos, quos illi deceptores nostri adversus divinos libros innectebant, posse dissolui*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 76).

116 Augustine, *Conf.* vi, 11.18 (see note 44).

narrative, already integrated into the *De utilitate credendi*, is more structured and detailed in the *Confessiones*, where it shares an audience of Manichaeans and Nicene Christians sceptical of Augustine's initiation in Italy. It had, as BeDuhn rightly suggests, the purpose of addressing issues which particularly challenged converts to Manichaeism in order to bring them to Christianity.<sup>117</sup> It is also worth reflecting on possible links between his marriage prospects and the decision to become a catechumen and later enter the baptismal preparation. Indeed, Augustine tells us that his marriage plans were favoured and supported by Monnica because "once married I would be washed in the saving water of baptism".<sup>118</sup> Despite these marriage prospects, and the connection Monnica made to baptism, however, Augustine's dismissal of his concubine—and her vow to chastity—, as well as Augustine's own understanding of conversion as an ascetic endeavour, would eventually lead him to sexual renunciation.<sup>119</sup> Concretely, it remains difficult to situate Augustine's decision to reintegrate the rank of catechumens. While Brown conjectured that it coincided with the arrival of his mother in Milan, it may more generally relate to his regular attendance to hear Ambrose's preaching between the end of 384 and 386.<sup>120</sup>

The *Confessiones* and two letters are, then, the only sources to follow Augustine's experience in Milan beyond the mention of his decision to become a catechumen. The letters, written respectively to Casulanus and Ianuarius perhaps around 395–396 and 400,<sup>121</sup> refer to Ambrose's advice given to Augustine

117 BeDuhn (2009), 28.

118 Augustine, *Conf.* vi, 13.23: "*quo me iam coniugatum baptismum salutaris ablueret*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 89; Chadwick (1991), 107).

119 See Asiedu, F.B.A., (2003), 'Following the Example of a Woman. Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386', *Vigiliae Christianae* 57/3, 276–306. For the dismissal of his former concubine see *Conf.* vi, 15.25; for discussion of this famous episode in a broader context see notably Zumkeller, A., (1989b) 'Die geplante Eheschließung Augustins und die Entlassung seiner Konkubine. Kulturgeschichtlicher und rechtlicher Hintergrund von *conf.* 6, 23 und 25', in Zumkeller (1989a), 21–35; Shanzer, D., (2002), '*Avulsa a latere meo*: Augustine's Spare Rib—Augustine, *Confessiones* 6.15.25', *JRS* 92, 157–176; Miles, M.R., (2007), 'Not Nameless but Unnamed: the Woman Torn from Augustine's Side', in Stark (2007), 167–188; Shanzer, D., (2017), 'Augustine's Anonyma 1 and Cornelius's Concubines: How Philology and Literary Criticism Can Help in Understanding Augustine on Marital Fidelity', *AugStud* 48/1–2, 201–224.

120 Augustine, *Conf.* ix, 4.8 (*catechumenus* in Cassiciacum).

121 Augustine, *Ep.* 36 is uncertainly dated: see Divjak, J., (2001), 'Epistulae', *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 893–1057, at 952. Dulaey, M., (2000), 'A quelle date Augustin a-t-il pris ses distances vis-à-vis du millénarisme?' *REAug* 46, 31–60, at 48 n. 87 and 88 notes that Ambrose is referred to as still alive and that a peculiar quotation from Is. 26, 20 is used, both suggesting an early dating around 395–397. *Ep.* 54 is not formally a letter but is part of a set of replies to questions of Ianuarius, written after Ambrose's death, around 400 (see Divjak (2001), 956).

for Monnica who doubted the correct practice of fasting on Saturdays. It is difficult to situate these questions: it has been argued that they were asked close to Augustine's baptism.<sup>122</sup> Augustine recalls twice that, as a catechumen, he did not share his mothers' concerns over fasting:

Hence, I shall tell you what the venerable Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, by whom I was baptised, replied to me when I asked him about this. For my mother was with me in the same city, and though while still catechumens we cared very little about these topics, she was deeply concerned about whether she should fast on the Sabbath according to the custom of our city or should eat in accord with the custom of the Church of Milan.<sup>123</sup>

My mother, who followed me to Milan, discovered that the Milanese Church did not fast on Saturday; she began to be upset and to be in doubt about what to do. At that time I was not concerned about such things, but on her account I consulted Ambrose, a man of blessed memory, on this point.<sup>124</sup>

It should be noted that Augustine, in the peculiar position of catechumens, is both distant enough not to be bothered by the issue of fasting and sufficiently involved in the Church to ask Ambrose for advice in matters of Christian behaviour. In the *Confessiones*, Augustine depicts himself in Milan as becoming increasingly close to Ambrose's Christian community, often referring to his recovering and increasing faith.<sup>125</sup> A remark in the seventh book, when Augustine describes his first Platonic ascent, is relevant to understand Augustine's position as a catechumen and his recollections of it. The excessive light of the One and the weakness of the observer prevent him from complet-

<sup>122</sup> Biffi (1987).

<sup>123</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 36, 14.32: "*Indicabo tibi, quid mihi de hoc requirenti responderit venerandus Ambrosius, a quo baptizatus sum, Mediolanensis episcopus. Nam cum in eadem civitate mater mea mecum esset et nobis adhuc catechumenis parum ista curantibus illa sollicitudinem gereret, utrum secundum morem nostrae civitatis sibi esset sabbato ieiunandum, an ecclesiae Mediolanensis more prandendum*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 34/2 (1898), 62; Teske, *WSA* 11/1 (2001), 141).

<sup>124</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 54, 2.3: "*Mater mea Mediolanum me consecuta invenit ecclesiam sabbato non ieiunare. Coeperat perturbari et fluctuari, quid ageret. Tunc ego talia non curabam, sed propter ipsam consului de hac re beatissimae memoriae virum Ambrosium*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 34/2 (1898), 160–161; Teske, *WSA* 11/1 (2001), 211).

<sup>125</sup> For instance *Conf.* VII, 5.7: "*Stabiliter tamen haerebat in corde meo in catholica ecclesia fides Christi tui*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 97. See on this process Mathon, G., (1955), 'Quand faut-il placer le retour d'Augustin à la foi catholique?', *REAug* 1, 107–127.

ing the ascent and lead him into the “region of dissimilarity” where he hears a voice speaking: “I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me”.<sup>126</sup> Madec has shown that this passage may refer, not only to the Eucharist, but to the opposition between Christ the Word made flesh and Christ the Word-God being respectively the milk of the little ones and the bread of angels.<sup>127</sup> The passage relates well with Augustine’s descriptions of catechumens, notably in a homily on the Gospel of John, where catechumens are said to hear that Christ is the Word made flesh but cannot understand and experience it as they have not been baptised and have not professed their faith.<sup>128</sup> In these passages of the *Confessiones* and in the two letters, Augustine presents his time as a catechumen in the same way that he describes any other catechumen in his preaching: attending church, hearing the preaching and discussing with clerics, but having an imperfect faith in Christ and lacking full participation in the church mysteries.

In the *Confessiones*, the conversion of Victorinus helps us to further illustrate Augustine’s position towards the decisive moments of 386.<sup>129</sup> For O’Donnell, the eighth book of the *Confessiones*, where the conversion of Victorinus is told, precisely narrates about Augustine preparing himself for a new commitment, even before starting the proper baptismal preparation.<sup>130</sup> The story, referring back to events in Rome in the 350s, is narrated by Simplicianus just before other exemplary conversion narratives, which end with the famous scene of the garden, when Augustine’s conversion is described.<sup>131</sup> Victorinus served as a powerful model, and in the context of Augustine’s retrospective recollection, as a powerful precedent—to which Augustine could identify and which could

126 Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 10.16: “*Cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. Nec tu in me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me*” (Verheijen, *CCL* 27 (1981), 103–104; Chadwick (1991), 124).

127 Madec (2001a), 51–52, 135–139, 158. On ascents in Augustine: Madec, G., (1988), ‘Ascensio-ascensus’, *AL* 1, fasc. 3/4, 465–475, esp. 469–470.

128 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2; see also S. 132, 1 and our discussion in Chapter 3, 1, pp. 145–150.

129 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 5.10. On Marius Victorinus: Drecoll, V.H., (2010b), ‘Marius Victorinus’, *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8, 1181–1185.

130 O’Donnell (2005), 59–60; similarly Fuhrer, T., (2013) ‘The “Milan Narrative” in Augustine’s *Confessions*: Intellectual and Material Spaces in Late Antique Milan’, *Studia Patristica* 70, 17–36, at 28–30.

131 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.3–5. On this story see as well Courcelle, P., (1966), ‘Parietes faciunt christianos?’, in *Mélanges d’archéologie, d’épigraphie et d’histoire offerts à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris), 241–248; Harmless (2014), 106–108.

help describe Augustine's own conversion process. Augustine, like Victorinus, was a rhetorician from Africa; he spent much time reading and considered himself Christian, even though he had not undergone full initiation. Only after repeatedly discussing the issue with Simplicianus, did Victorinus realise that ritual integration was essential for him to be recognised as a Christian:

Simplicianus said Victorinus read holy scripture, and all the Christian books he investigated with special care. After examining them he said to Simplicianus, not openly but in the privacy of friendship, 'Did you know that I am already a Christian?' Simplicianus replied: 'I shall not believe that or count you among the Christians unless I see you in the Church of Christ'. Victorinus laughed and said: 'Then do walls make Christians?' [...] He became ashamed of the emptiness of those rites and felt respect for the truth. Suddenly and unexpectedly he said to Simplicianus (as he told me): 'Let us go to the church: I want to become a Christian'. [...] Not long after he had received his instructions in the first mysteries, he gave in his name for baptism that he might be reborn.<sup>132</sup>

The story of the pagan rhetorician who was finally convinced to ask for baptism served to illustrate the necessity to commit to the *ecclesia* beyond the catechumenate. Indeed, Augustine presents his conversion in close relation to what he depicts as a growing church practice and a desire for religious initiation, particularly triggered by Simplicianus' narrative: "As soon as your servant Simplicianus told me this story about Victorinus, I was ardent to follow his example".<sup>133</sup> The narrative of Augustine's time as a catechumen in Milan in the *Confessiones* aims to demonstrate that the conversion took place after a long and progressive reintegration into the Catholic Church, offering a model of conversion based on ritual participation that Augustine would regularly employ in his calls to catechumens, as we will see in the study of Augustine's

132 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.4: "Egebat, sicut ait Simplicianus, sanctam scripturam omnesque christianas litteras investigabat studiosissime et perscrutabatur et dicebat Simpliciano non palam, sed secretius et familiarius: 'noveris me iam esse christianum.' Et respondebat ille: 'non credam nec deputabo te inter christianos, nisi in ecclesia Christi videro.' Ille autem iridebat dicens: 'ergo parietes faciunt christianos?' [...] Depuduit vanitati et erubuit veritati subitoque et inopinatus ait Simpliciano, ut ipse narrabat: 'eamus in ecclesiam: christianus volo fieri.' [...] Ubi autem imbutus est primis instructionis sacramentis, non multo post etiam nomen dedit, ut per baptismum regeneraretur" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 115–116; Chadwick (1991), 136).

133 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 5.10: "Sed ubi mihi homo tuus Simplicianus de Victorino ista narravit, exarsi ad imitandum" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 119; Chadwick (1991), 139).



invitations for baptism in Chapter 3. Augustine also elaborated his narratives to fit his specific concerns as a cleric who was questioned about his Manichaean past and had to show the continuity of his commitment to the Catholic Church, relating his upbringing as a catechumen in Africa to his conversion and initiation in Milan. However, despite BeDuhn's view, who assesses this narrative as a fully anachronistic recollection, it should be noted that nothing in the evidence is against the fact, already stated in the *Contra academicos*, and repeated in the *De utilitate credendi* and the *Confessiones*, that Augustine truly felt reconnected to his Christian upbringing in Milan. It was important to him, as O'Donnell underlines, to be initiated in the same Church to which he would return in his hometown.<sup>134</sup>

### 3.2 *Augustine's Catechumenate in Milan and Evidence in Ambrose's Writings*

The *Confessiones*, however helpful, only provide passing remarks on Augustine's status and activities as a catechumen in Milan, mainly showing how he became progressively more involved in the community. Augustine's emphasis on the preaching of Ambrose as a decisive trigger for Augustine's decision to integrate the rank of the catechumens and the lack of descriptions about his initiation in Milan explain why most scholars have attempted to fill these gaps and consider the evidence provided in Ambrose about the ritual initiation and catechesis of catechumens in his city.<sup>135</sup> As no common ground emerges in scholarship, the outcome of such studies—which extensively dwelled on the issue of how Augustine encountered neoplatonism in Milan—is mainly to show that, while Augustine attended Ambrose's preaching, it is very difficult to identify the sermons which Augustine may have heard.<sup>136</sup> Despite this, the available evidence gives us a picture of what Ambrose taught catechumens in general during his episcopate. His teaching particularly dwelled on ethics, with

<sup>134</sup> BeDuhn (2009), 23; O'Donnell (2005), 212–213; also Brown (2000), 70–71.

<sup>135</sup> See note 4.

<sup>136</sup> See Palanque, J.R., (1933), *Saint Ambroise et l'Empire Romain; contribution à l'Histoire des rapports de l'Église et de l'État à la fin du quatrième siècle* (Paris), esp. 437–466 (Ambrose's sermons behind most of his treatises and their hypothetical dating); Courcelle (1968), 93–138 (what Augustine might have heard); Madec, G., (1974), *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie* (Paris), 60–71 (Ambrose's preaching on neo-platonism), and an overview in Colish, M.L. (2005), *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame, IN), 24–28. For further discussion on chronology and a bibliography on Ambrosian studies see Visonà, G., (2004), *Cronologia ambrosiana. Bibliografia ambrosiana, 1900–2000* (Milan); for more recent years see the yearly 'Bibliografia ambrosiana' published in *Annali di Scienze Religiose* since 2008.

Old Testament figures discussed and interpreted allegorically to serve as role models for catechumens.<sup>137</sup> In terms of liturgical practices, Ambrose's writings focus, like most late antique sources, on the pre-baptismal preparation, with however a few details about the status and practices of ordinary catechumens. I do not aim here to repeat what fine studies have said about Ambrose's catechesis and ritual practices in Milan, nor attempt to provide a full discussion of Ambrose's evidence.<sup>138</sup> I have the more modest objective of showing briefly what Ambrose had to say about catechumens and their initiation and how this puts in perspective Augustine's autobiographical recollections.

Ambrose describes catechumens as being in an intermediary stage: they already believe in God, sign themselves with his cross on the forehead, and are not allowed to engage in idolatry.<sup>139</sup> At the same time, however, they have not yet shown a full commitment and require baptism for the cleansing of their sins.<sup>140</sup> Thus, they are dismissed from church after the sermon and the core mysteries are not open to them.<sup>141</sup> Before baptism, catechumens are not necessarily well instructed about Christianity and they are less liable to church discipline: Ambrose states for example that it is worse for a baptised Christian than a catechumen to abandon the Church.<sup>142</sup> In his polemic against

137 See a short overview in Harmless (2014), 99–102; for more details: Warren Smith, J., (2011), *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics* (Oxford), esp. 69–221 (Ambrose's theology of baptism); Colish (2005), esp. 13–30.

138 Besides studies quoted in the preceding notes, for more details on initiation practices in Ambrose see Monachino (1947), 29–49; Mesot, J., (1958), *Die Heidenbekehrung bei Ambrosius von Mailand* (Schöneck-Beckenried), esp. 73–105; Schmitz, J., (1975), *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand* (Cologne-Bonn), 35–76; Satterlee (2002), 145–185.

139 Ambrose, *De mysteriis* IV, 20: "Credit autem etiam catechumenus in cruce domini Iesu, qua et ipse signatur; sed nisi baptizatus fuerit in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti, remissionem non potest accipere peccatorum nec spiritalis gratiae munus haurire" (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 97); *Ep. extra collectionem* 10, 2: "Nec ad excusationem obtendi posse quod esset catechuminus, cum etiam catechuminis non liceat sumptus idolis subministrare" (Zelzer, *CSEL* 82/3 (1982), 206).

140 Ambrose, *De obitu Valentiniani* 52: "Aut si, quia sollemniter non sunt celebrata mysteria, hoc movet, ergo nec martyres, si catechumeni fuerint, coronantur; non enim coronantur, si non initiantur" (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 355).

141 Ambrose, *De mysteriis* I, 2: "Nunc de mysteriis dicere tempus admonet atque ipsam rationem sacramentorum edere, quam ante baptismum si putassemus insinuandam nondum initiatis, prodidisse potius quam edidisse aestimaremur" (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 89); see also IX, 55; *De Abraham* I, 5, 38; *De Cain et Abel* I, 9, 35–37; *Expositio psalmi XVIII*, 2, 26–28; *In Lucam* VI, 106; *De sacramentis* I, 1.1 and III, 2.12 (of disputed authenticity, see Savon, H., (2012), 'Doit-on attribuer à Ambroise le *De sacramentis*?', in Passarella, R., (ed.), (2012), *Ambrogio e la liturgia* (Milan), 23–45).

142 Ambrose, *In Lucam* X, 28: "Si enim catecumenus quis vel hereticus vel schismaticus tam-

Auxentius, Ambrose also resorts to the imperfect religious status of emperor Valentinian II to reject the claim that he would be able to act as a judge in the controversy over the basilicas: Valentinian is not only a youth but also a catechumen, ignorant of the Scriptures.<sup>143</sup> Thus, baptism not only grants catechumens full access to the rituals, but it is a decisive opportunity to learn about Christianity, erase past sins, and change one's way of life.<sup>144</sup> Ambrose greatly emphasises the significance of baptism as a transformation of habits: comparing the twelve Apostles and the former persecutor Paul, he states that there is greater honour, like the Apostle Paul, in receiving baptism and changing one's attitude after a particularly sinful life.<sup>145</sup> For Ambrose, therefore, catechumens need to be brought to closer ritual integration in order to be led to a radical change of life, which is the main focus of his preaching to catechumens. Comparing this evidence with Augustine's shows that the description of his growing but still limited integration into the Church in Milan—attending church, showing little care about fasting practices, preparing for a radical change of habits—well matches with what Ambrose experienced and expected. The central value of morals in the conversion process, as particularly described in the *Confessiones*, shows the same concerns of Ambrose about the ethical nature of initiation. While Ambrose's evidence cannot be deemed to fill the gaps of Augustine's account about his experience, it still reveals a broader shared framework.<sup>146</sup> Augustine, in line with Ambrose's teaching, presents the catechumenate as a decisive period of his life, particularly because of the inter-

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*quam de utero vel animae vel ecclesiae parturientis excusserit, levius punitur; si fidelem, gravius*" (Adriaen, *CSSL* 14 (1957), 354).

- 143 Ambrose, *Contra Auxentium* = *Ep.* 75A.29: "*De imperatore vult invidiam commovere, dicens iudicare debere adolescentem catechuminum sacrae lectionis ignarum et in consistorio iudicare*" (Zelzer, *CSEL* 82/3 (1982), 101).
- 144 Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1, 4.23: "*Fecisti gentilis adulterium, fecisti catechumenus: ignoscitur tibi, remittitur per baptismum, vade et post haec vide ne pecces*" (Schenkl, *CSEL* 32/1 (1897), 518); see also *Explanatio psalmorum* 1, 21. Ambrose also insists on this aspect by preaching against unsincere conversions in *Expositio Psalmi XVIII*, 20, 48–49.
- 145 Ambrose, *De Noe* 8, 24–25: "*Quibus si quis iuventae inretitus tempore, cum ad maturiorem aetatem processerit, veniat ad baptismum, renuntiet superioribus moresque priores exuat, peccata deponat, consepeliatur cum domino Iesu, crucifigatur ei mundus et ipse mundo, nonne is peccatorum remissione donatus abundantiore honestatem habet quam ille catechumenus, cuius vita innocentior aestimabatur?*" (Schenkl, *CSEL* 32/1 (1897), 429).
- 146 For an overview of Ambrose's influence over Augustine and the issues that this question raises, see Dassmann, E., (1986), 'Ambrosius', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 270–285, esp. 277–282; McLynn, N., (1999a), 'Ambrose of Milan', in Fitzgerald, A.D., (ed.), (1999a), *Augustine Through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids MI-Cambridge), 17–19, and for a more detailed study Ferretti, G., (1951) *L'influsso di s. Ambrogio in s. Agostino* (Faenza).

mediary and uncertain status of catechumens. His time spent as a catechumen in Milan was to bring Augustine to a fuller commitment, setting aside former doubts and opening the way for a deeper understanding and closer involvement in the Christian community.

### 3.3 *Enrolling for Baptism*

At the end of summer of 386, Augustine decided to fundamentally change his way of life. The *Confessiones* are the only work narrating this climax in Augustine's conversion process in an elaborate way, which culminates with the famous episode of the garden.<sup>147</sup> One day, Augustine tells us, after hearing stories of conversion to asceticism from Ponticianus, he went to the nearby garden, sitting in tears, because he had failed to bring such a change to his own life. He then heard a childlike voice calling him to pick up and read Paul's letters (*tolle, lege*). After reading Rm 13, 13–14—exhorting him to abandon his sinful habits—he was finally set free and ready to convert and embrace asceticism.<sup>148</sup> He thus decided to leave his teaching post and retreated to Cassiciacum with his friends, students and family.<sup>149</sup> Beyond this particularly well known and studied narrative, which describes Augustine's progressive conversion with vivid imagery through an exemplary episode, Augustine says little about the next steps of his initiation at this period. All that is known is found in the dialogues he wrote during his retreat in Cassiciacum, in addition to the *Confessiones* and the *Retractationes* reviewing his works at the end of his life. However, the dialogues themselves do not contain any reference to his initiation. As shown, they are restricted to Augustine's rejection of his religious upbringing when converting to Manichaeism and then to his reclaiming of it in Milan. In general, they are mostly concerned with philosophical questions and reveal an atmosphere of learned discussions. Therefore, the *Confessiones* provide again the only comments on how he considered himself as a catechumen who was about to enter baptismal preparation.

Augustine recalls this period in the ninth book: "I was but a beginner (*rudis*) in authentic love of you, a catechumen (*catechumenus*) resting at a country villa with another catechumen, Alypius".<sup>150</sup> Augustine describes himself as still not fully initiated, sharing with Alypius his status of catechumen and

147 For more discussion of this episode, which is beyond the focus of our study, see the works quoted in note 1 at the beginning of this chapter.

148 Augustine *Conf.* VIII, 7.17–12.29.

149 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 5.13.

150 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.8: "*Rudis in germano amore tuo, catechumenus in villa cum catechumeno Alypio feriatu*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 137; Chadwick (1991), 160).

aiming at progressing in the love of God. This matches well the intense writing at Cassiciacum, with an emphasis, lacking in the dialogues, on the technical term of *catechumenus*. The bishop describes this literary activity as a catechumen quite negatively: he was not yet fully committed, dedicating all his works to God but still filling them with pride.<sup>151</sup> Later, remembering how he recovered from a toothache after a collective prayer, he notes: “Your will was brought home to me in the depths of my being, and rejoicing in faith I praised your name. This faith did not allow me to be free of guilt over my past sins, which had not yet been forgiven through your baptism.”<sup>152</sup>

Augustine’s decision to seek baptism would finally bring him to fuller integration and to receive forgiveness for his sins. To begin this process, a letter was sent to Ambrose to ask for permission to receive baptism and for reading advice to prepare for it. Ambrose recommended reading Isaiah; however, after reading the beginning and failing to understand it, Augustine put the book aside.<sup>153</sup> The catechumen in the villa as depicted in the *Confessiones* is a candidate eager to learn and write about God but who is still not fully perfected in his approach and understanding of Christianity. This view is carried on in the *Retractationes* thirty years later.<sup>154</sup> In these recollections, Augustine’s appraisal of his time as a catechumen well matches his views on catechumens in general—as we will see in the next chapters—showing how the presentation of his past experience is impregnated by his pastoral concerns. It also corresponds, as we have seen, to Ambrose’s descriptions of catechumens. Augustine, like other catechumens, has faith and desire for further adhesion but lacks fundamental understanding, because he has not yet concretely experienced the rites of initiation.

There is little evidence in terms of ritual practices of Augustine as a catechumen in the account of the *Confessiones*. However, the mentioned letter to Ambrose perhaps contains useful evidence, generally left unnoticed. Augustine states to God that he “informed your bishop, the holy man Ambrose, of my

151 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.7.

152 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.12: “*Et insinuati sunt mihi in profundo nutus tui et gaudens in fide laudavi nomen tuum, et ea fides me securum esse non sinebat de praeteritis peccatis meis, quae mihi per baptismum tuum remissa nondum erant*” (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 140; Chadwick (1991), 163).

153 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 5.13: “*At ille iussit Esaiam prophetam, credo, quod prae ceteris evangelii vocationisque gentium sit praenuntior apertior. Verum tamen ego primam huius lectionem non intellegens totumque talem arbitrans distul*” (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 140).

154 Augustine, *Retr.* Prol. 3: “*Nec illa sane praetereo quae cathecumini iam, licet relicta spe quam terrenam gerebam, sed adhuc saecularium litterarum inflatus consuetudine scripsi*” (Mutzenbecher, *CCSL* 57 (1984), 6).

past errors and my present intention".<sup>155</sup> This may have been intended to serve as a first formal abjuration and renunciation of Manichaeism, required from apostates to enter the baptismal preparation, when candidates would again perform a rite of renunciation.<sup>156</sup> This interpretation of Augustine's letter is particularly suggested by the late fifth- or early sixth-century Roman pseudo-epigraphic *Commonitorium Augustini quod fertur* (CPL 533), which recommends that former Manichaeans should send a written renunciation to their bishop who in return should write a letter granting admission to prepare for baptism with the help of a sponsor, who accompanies them to church and can witness to their commitment.<sup>157</sup> The formal process described in the *Commonitorium*, which ends with a list of anathemas that the converts need to include in the letter of renunciation, may be based on earlier traditions requiring former Manichaeans to demonstrate their wish to convert through writing and approval of a bishop. Augustine may thus have been required, in order to enter the Lenten baptismal preparation, to write a letter fully renouncing his past affiliation to Manichaeism. It remains unsure, however, when this letter was sent, whether at the end of summer, before leaving for Cassiciacum or, perhaps more likely, during his winter stay at the villa.<sup>158</sup>

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- 155 Augustine, *Conf.* 1X, 5,13: "Et insinuavi per litteras antistiti tuo, viro sancto Ambrosio, pristinos errores meos et praesens votum meum" (Verheijen, *CSSL* 27 (1981), 140; Chadwick (1991), 163 adapted). For Trapè (1974), 8 this letter was the first "confession" rejecting Manichaeism.
- 156 Also noted in Perrin, M.-Y., (2013–2014), 'Aristoteles Poenorum. Portraits d'Augustin en "hérétique"', *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses* 122, 265–267. On apostates and abjuration from Manichaeism see with further references: Perrin, M.-Y., (2007b), 'Le témoignage des ralliés: une arme de la polémique doctrinale entre chrétiens dans l'antiquité tardive', in Maraval, P., Tollet, D., (eds.), (2007), *La religion que j'ai quittée* (Paris), 65–86.
- 157 *Commonitorium Augustini quod fertur*: "Cum anathemaverint eandem haeresim per hanc formam infra scriptam libellumque dederit unusquisque eorum confessionis et paenitentiae suae atque anathematis eis petens in ecclesia vel catechumeni vel paenitentis locum, si libellus eius episcopo placuerit eumque acceptaverit, det ei epistolam cum die et consule, ut nullam de superiore tempore molestiam vel de publicis legibus vel de disciplina ecclesiastica patiatur. [...] Commendentur autem religiosi catholicis vicinis vel cohabitatoribus suis, sive clericis sive laicis, per quorum erga se curam frequentent audientiam sermonis dei et quorum testimonio possint innotescere" (Zycha, J., (ed.), *CSEL* 25/2 (1892), 979). For the dating in Ostrogothic Rome and a detailed discussion see Villegas Marín, R., (2017), 'Abjuring Manichaeism in Ostrogothic Rome and Provence: The *Commonitorium quomodo sit agendum cum Manichaeis* and the *Prosperi anathematismi*', *Studia Patristica* 97(23), 159–168.
- 158 For Harmless (2014), 110 it would be shortly before he resigned from his teaching post.

## 4 A Disciple of Ambrose: The Baptismal Preparation

### 4.1 *Passing References in the Confessiones and Ambrose's Evidence*

After the retreat at the villa in winter, Augustine came back to Milan at the beginning of 387 to start the formal baptismal preparation. Apart from brief mentions in the *Confessiones*, Augustine's preparation for baptism is only recalled starting from the 410s, thus during the Pelagian controversy. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of his recollections about his catechumenate, which mostly concentrated in earlier works, culminating in the *Confessiones*. In this work, the focus is clearly not on the ritual process. The baptismal preparation is briefly mentioned after a short summary of Augustine's activities in Cassiciacum. Augustine simply says that he went to Milan with Alypius and Adeodatus to prepare for baptism at the appropriate time. He then recalls Alypius' ascetic practice of walking barefoot to reach Milan, and offers a short presentation of his son Adeodatus.<sup>159</sup> The only initiation practice attested in this passage is the *nomen dare* which refers to the widely attested custom of giving one's name to be enrolled to prepare for baptism.<sup>160</sup> Employing the metaphor of the athlete entering spiritual combat, Ambrose refers to the same rite, which in Milan at his time probably took place between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent, thus at the period when candidates prepared for baptism performed at Easter.<sup>161</sup> This was a significant step to take for catechumens, particularly in the context of the Arian controversy in Milan, because it meant choosing one's side and seeking closer integration—indeed, in the *Confessiones*, immediately after his baptism, Augustine discusses the troubles of 386 in Milan.<sup>162</sup> Ambrose often exhorted catechumens in his audience to seek baptism, while apparently facing some resistance from reluctant catechumens—as it would be the case for Augustine later as a bishop of Hippo.<sup>163</sup> In an

159 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14: "*Inde ubi tempus advenit, quo me nomen dare oportet, relicto rure Mediolanium remeavimus. Placuit et Alypio renasci in te mecum iam induto humilitate sacramentis tuis congrua et fortissimo domitori corporis usque ad Italicum solum glaciale nudo pede obtinendum insolito ausu. Adiunximus etiam nobis puerum Adeodatum ex me natum carnaliter de peccato meo*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 140–141).

160 In Augustine's *Conf.* besides the previously quoted passage, see *Conf.* VIII, 2.4 (about Marius Victorinus); for more discussion on this rite see Chapter 4, pp. 179–197.

161 Ambrose, *De Helia et Ieiunio* 21, 79: "*Numquid athleta otio vacat, cum semel dederit certamini nomen suum?*" (Schenkl, *CSEL* 32/2 (1897), 460); see also *De Abraham* 1, 4.23; *In Lucam* IV, 76; *De sacramentis* III, 2, 12. On baptism at Easter: *De Helia et Ieiunio* 10, 34. For enrolment in Turin at the same period see Maximus, *Sermones* 13, 1; 65, 1–3; 91, 2; 111, 3.

162 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 7.15.

163 See in particular Ambrose, *De Helia et Ieiunio* 22, 83: "*Nolite timere quia iugum est: festinate, quia leve est.*" (cf. Mt 11, 30). *Non conerit colla, sed honestat. Quid dubitatis, quid*

instance, the bishop of Milan refers to the unsuccessful fishing of Simon (Lc 5, 5) to complain about his own yet unsuccessful fishing, as no one had enrolled for baptism since his last call at Epiphany. This suggests that the enrolment phase may have extended for some time to allow for multiple calls—an hypothesis that, as we will see, can also be made for the initiation in Hippo.<sup>164</sup>

Those who made this new commitment were now called *competentes* or *electi* and underwent penitential ritual practices, particularly fasting and a scrutiny, which entailed a ritual examination of candidates with exorcism.<sup>165</sup> They would also receive intensive pre-baptismal catechesis from the bishop, which, as Ambrose tells us, focused on morals, using the deeds of the Patriarchs and Proverbs as models for instruction.<sup>166</sup> Ambrose notably preached *De Helia etieiunio* around the beginning of Lent, in which he exhorted catechumens to enter the baptismal preparation and undergo fasting and abstinence; the first book of his *De Abraham*, comprising a number of sermons put together focusing on moral teaching, also particularly addresses *competentes*.<sup>167</sup> Beyond moral instruction, however, perhaps mostly towards the end of the preparation, catechesis also had to focus on the creed, and particularly the Trinity, to fight heretical beliefs and build a sense of belonging.<sup>168</sup> It can be assumed that Augustine and his companions received anti-heretical catechesis during their

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*procrastinatis? [...] Quid negas adhuc esse temporis? Omnes tempus oportunitum ad indulgentiam. [...] Nemo differt, nullus excusat. Redemptio animae promittitur, et nemo festinat*" etc. (Schenlk, *CSEL* 32/2 (1897), 463); see as well *De Abraham* 11, 10.74; *De Ioseph* 8, 43; *In Lucam* VI, 221; *De paenitentia* 11, 11.98; *De sacramentis* 111, 2, 12–13.

- 164 Ambrose, *In Lucam* IV, 76: "Nemo adhuc dedit nomen suum, adhuc noctem habeo. Misi iaculum vocis per epifania et adhuc nihil cepi, misi per diem" (Adriaen, *CCSL* 14 (1957), 134). See as well *De virginitate* 130–131.
- 165 See Ambrose, *Explanation symboli* 1. Augustine's *S.* 216 similarly records an examination, see our discussion of these rites in Chapter 4.
- 166 Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 1, 1: "De moralibus cottidianum sermonem habuimus, cum vel patriarcharum gesta vel proverbiorum legerentur praecepta, ut his informati atque instituti adsuesceretis maiorum ingredi vias eorumque iter carpere ac divinis oboedire oraculis, quo renovati per baptismum eius vitae usum teneretis, quae ablutos deceret" (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 89; *cottidianus sermo* here may refer to frequent preaching, not necessarily daily). For Ambrose instructing *competentes* see Paulinus of Milan, *Vita Ambrosii* 38 (BHL 377).
- 167 Specific passages show this, see Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1, 4.23, 4.25, 7.59, 9.89. The *Hexameron*, commenting on Genesis, was also probably read during Holy Week but not addressing *competentes* in particular (see Palanque (1933), 437 and 519). Other passages pointing to *competentes* as a target audience are found in *De Cain et Abel* 11, 3.10; *Explanatio Psalmi* 1, 21.
- 168 Ambrose, *In Lucam* VI, 104–107, esp. 107 "Quodsi ad sacramenta fidelium tendens catechumenus inbuendus sit, dicendum quia unus deus est, ex quo omnia, et unus Iesus christus, per quem omnia, non duos dominos esse dicendos, perfectum quidem patrem, perfectum esse et filium" etc. (Adriaen, *CCSL* 14 (1957), 213); see also *De paradiso* XII, 58 (naming Photinus, Arius and Sabellius).



preparation in Milan. For Augustine as for other Milanese candidates, the culmination of this instruction process must have been the handing over of the creed and its explanation verse by verse, a ceremony which was restricted to the candidates to baptism and took place on Palm Sunday in the baptistery, as clear from a remark of Ambrose.<sup>169</sup> As we will see in Chapter 4, Augustine similarly taught the creed before baptism in Hippo. Ambrose, as Augustine would do after him, besides the commentary of the articles of the creed, focused on the meaning of *symbolum*, the word for the creed, and on the importance of avoiding putting the creed into writing, which was later to be memorised and recited by candidates before baptism.<sup>170</sup> Contrary to the practice in Hippo, however, Ambrose only taught the Lord's Prayer after baptism.<sup>171</sup> The teaching and recitation of the creed concluded the catechumenate and was followed by the baptismal rites taking place at Easter Vigil.

Knowing all these pre-baptismal practices, it is noteworthy that Augustine's account in the *Confessiones*, which is very brief, does nothing to corroborate Ambrose's evidence about Lenten rituals and catechesis. After presenting Adeodatus, Augustine simply states, highlighting that initiation was a collective practice as much as an individual one, that "we were baptised, and disquiet about our past life vanished from us".<sup>172</sup> The simplicity and shortness of the account has often surprised scholars who have suggested various explanations. The attested practice of the *disciplina arcani*, which meant that core parts of Christian rituals were hidden to unbelievers and uninitiated Christians has been evoked as a possible reason for the lack of a more detailed account, since the *Confessiones* enjoyed a wide readership.<sup>173</sup> However, Augustine still refers in other works with similar diffusion to some practices of initiation like

169 Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.3: "*Sequenti die, erat autem dominica, post lectiones atque tractatum dimissis catechuminis symbolum aliquibus competentibus in baptisterii tradebam basilica*" (Zelzer, *CSEL* 82/3 (1982), 109); the content of this catechesis is known thanks to Ambrose's *Explanatio symboli* (of sometimes disputed authenticity, see *CPL* 153).

170 Ambrose, *Explanatio symboli* 2–3 and 9: "*Illud sane monitos vos volo esse, quoniam symbolum non debet scribi, quia reddere illud habetis. Sed nemo scribat. Qua ratione? Sic accepimus ut non debeat scribi. Sed quid? Teneri*" (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 11); see Harmless (2014), 114–116.

171 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* v, 4.18–30.

172 Augustine, *Conf.* ix, 6.14: "*Et baptizati sumus et fugit a nobis sollicitudo vitae praeteritae*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 141; Chadwick (1991), 164).

173 Busch (1938), 389–390; Warren Smith (2011), 6; Harmless (2014), 117–118. For the baptismal rites see the overviews in Harmless (2014), 117–125, and Paredi, A., (1966), 'Dove fu battezzato sant'Agostino', *RecAug* 4, 11–26 for the baptismal ceremony in the baptistery attached to the *basilica nova*. Wills (2012), 85–122 offers another recent but at times fictionalised synthesis. On the *disciplina arcani* see Chapter 2.

the handing over of the creed and the Lord's Prayer, exorcisms and penance: he could have done the same in the *Confessiones*.<sup>174</sup>

It has also been suggested that Augustine's brief description may be due to his desire not to overemphasise the role of clerics in the administration of sacraments in the context of the Donatist controversy. Focusing on the agency of God in every aspect of his conversion without referring to the actions of clerics could have been a powerful argument. Indeed, Donatists would have been most concerned about the minister of baptism, since they believed, contrary to Augustine, that the sins of the minister may affect the candidate to baptism. This would have been particularly relevant for Augustine, whom they accused of having been baptised as a Manichaean; moreover, the authority of Ambrose would not have been necessarily recognised by them.<sup>175</sup> In a sermon on Psalm 36 preached in Carthage, probably dated to September 403 and addressed against Donatists, Augustine notes that Donatists know his past and use it to accuse him:

For they say, "Who are these? Where do they come from? We know those bad fellows here, but where were they baptised?" If they know us so well they must know that we travelled abroad. They know too that we came back very different from what we were when we set out. No, we were not baptised here, but the church where we were baptised is known throughout the world. Plenty of our brethren know that we were baptised, and some were baptised with us.<sup>176</sup>

This recollection is therefore intended to defend Augustine and his fellows baptised in Italy against Donatists, recalling the narrative of the *Confessiones*, which is known to have been used by Donatists against Augustine.<sup>177</sup> However,

174 On these rites see particularly Augustine, *S.* 56–59; 212–216; *Symb. cat.* discussed in Chapter 4. Another point to emphasise is that Manichaean readers, a significant audience of Augustine's *Confessiones*, did not put great value in the rite of baptism, which may also explain why Augustine did not dwell on this aspect in his work.

175 O'Donnell (1992), III, 108; Chadwick (2003), 1169.

176 Augustine, *In Ps.* 36, III, 19: "*Dicunt enim: et qui sunt? Et unde sunt? Malos hic illos novimus, ubi baptizati sunt? Si nos bene noverunt, sciunt quia et navigavimus aliquando; sciunt quia et peregrinati sumus; sciunt quia alii ivimus, et alii redimus. Non hic baptizati sumus; sed ubi baptizati sumus, ecclesia est nota universo orbi terrarum. Et multi fratres nostri sunt, qui et norunt quia baptizati sumus, et nobiscum baptizati sunt*" (Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 38 (1956), 381; Boulding, *WSA* III/15 (2000), 144). For the dating: Hombert (2000) 12–13, 191–193; Dulaey, *BA* 58B (2014), 397–401.

177 See Augustine, *C. litt. Petil.* III, 16.19–17.20 and Dulaey and Perrin, *BA* 58/B (2014), 560–561 n. 78 with references.

the hypothetical anti-Donatist background of the passage in the *Confessiones* does not fully explain its silence: Augustine could also have described all the rituals of initiation to defend himself while conferring to God every power and validity in their performance against Donatists. Another possibility is that Augustine's reluctance to dwell on his baptismal preparation relates to the events of 386: his belated commitment in 387, a year after Ambrose's resistance during Easter time, was perhaps not worthy of attention and could have been better told in few and simple words.<sup>178</sup> It could also be suggested, with similar attention to the immediate context, that Augustine kept a low profile in 387 and in his later autobiographical account because he had only recently renounced Manichaeism, perhaps only officially with his letter to Ambrose.

The interpretation of Augustine's reluctance to include a fuller account, in spite of the significance of this period of initiation for baptismal candidates, ultimately depends on the way that the passage is read: emphasising immediate concerns of 386–387 suggests their lasting impact on the *Confessiones*, while focusing on the bishop's perspective gives more ground to the polemic against Donatists. However, there is no need to read the passage as a reflection of an immediate and specific context: while BeDuhn probably has gone too far suggesting that Augustine simply had little interest in rituals throughout his life,<sup>179</sup> it is plausible to say that his narrative followed other aims. Reading the *Confessiones* as a work presenting Augustine's theological conceptions rather than the immediate concerns of Church politics and practices may give the key to understanding Augustine's brevity. Descriptions of the baptismal rite are not provided in the *Confessiones* but the bath of baptism, particularly the grace associated with it, and the forgiveness of sins that it brings, are very often alluded to.<sup>180</sup> This is certainly because they serve the aim of illustrating the condition of mankind and its relationship with God, so central to the work. Bochet has noted that both the *Confessiones* and Augustine's explanations of Psalms 1 to 32 composed at the same period emphasise the significance of Augustine's meditation of psalms during his conversion. The explanations in particular contain several allusions to the baptismal liturgy, notably explanations on Psalms 22 and 26 which are known to have been chanted during the

178 See McLynn, N., (1994), *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Los Angeles-Berkeley), esp. 181–252; on Augustine's silence concerning the events of 386: Fuhrer (2013), 24–36.

179 BeDuhn (2009), 37. Augustine alludes very often to rituals in his works: as a cleric he had to develop his thinking on rituals and supervised them every year, while he also employed them in polemics.

180 On this Madec (2001a), 55–59.

baptismal preparation and after baptism.<sup>181</sup> Thus, although baptism was clearly a significant act in Milan in 387, in Augustine's process of conversion and in the retelling of it in the *Confessiones*, the lack of concrete descriptions should not necessarily be related with immediate concerns of Augustine but rather be understood as a result of the genre and narrative choices made by the writer. Augustine's brief account of his preparation and baptism in the *Confessiones*, however, was not the last time that the bishop discussed this essential step in his religious and intellectual journey.

#### 4.2 *Later Recollections of the Milanese Initiation*

After the *Confessiones*, Augustine only recalled his baptismal preparation starting from the 410s and in his later anti-Pelagian polemics: first in 411–413 when he wrote to Fortunatian of Sicca (*Ep.* 148 perhaps in late 411) and Paulina (*Ep.* 147, in 412–413) and composed the *De fide et operibus* (412–413), then in the polemics with Julian of Aeclanum in the first books of the *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (418–419) and *Contra Iulianum* (421).<sup>182</sup> Broadly, Augustine's references to his initiation in Milan are to be related to the progressively greater resort to Ambrose's figure and writing after his death (397), and particularly after the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, culminating with the polemics against Julian of Aeclanum in the late 410s and until Augustine's death in 430.<sup>183</sup>

The first time that Augustine returns to his initiation is in the two letters written in the early 410s. The letters are closely related and try to resolve the opposition between John 1, 18 (*"Deus nemo vidit umquam"*) and the theophanies which

181 Bochet, I., (2000), 'L'expérience de la conversion selon les 32 premières *Enarrationes in Psalmos* d'Augustin', in *Lesegesi dei Padri latini. Dalle origini a Gregorio Magno* (Rome), 307–330. Augustine, S. 216 cites Psalm 26 to his *competentes*; for Psalm 22 see our discussion of anonymous sermons in Chapter 5, pp. 276–286.

182 The focus on Ambrose's catechesis in the years 411–413 is noted by Courcelle (1968), 212 n. 7. Moreover, Hombert has suggested that *Ep.* 147 and the *De fide et operibus* may have been composed at around the same period in connection to Augustine's stay in Carthage in the winter 412–413, noting commonalities with sermons preached there in early 413. For this and the dating of *Ep.* 147 and 148 see Hombert (2000), 183–184. For a more thorough discussion of the dating of *F. et op.* see Pignot, M., (2018), 'Setting Rules for Becoming Christian: Augustine's Polemical Treatise *De fide et operibus* in Context', *REAug* 64, 73–114, esp. 75–78 and 108–112.

183 See an overview of Augustine's resort to Ambrose in Dassmann (1986), esp. 275–277; McLynn (1999a), 18. On the early influence: Cipriani, N., (1997), 'Le opere di Ambrogio negli scritti di Agostino anteriori all'episcopato', *La Scuola Cattolica* 125, 763–800; for the *Confessiones* and later works, particularly in the Pelagian controversy: Grossi, V., (1998), 'Sant'Ambrogio e sant'Agostino, Per una rilettura dei loro rapporti', in Pizzolato, L.F., Rizzi, M., (eds.), *Atti del Congresso internazionale di studi ambrosiani nel XVI centenario della morte di sant'Ambrogio, Milano 1997* (Milan), 405–462, esp. 414–449.

are found in both the Old and New Testament. Augustine draws on Ambrose's exegesis on Luke, quoting it a number of times as a helpful guide to solve these questions and refute heretics.<sup>184</sup> Concluding his letter 147, also known as the book *De videndo Deo*, Augustine refers to his own baptism and connection to Ambrose, explaining how Ambrose's authority, used to solve the questions put forth by Paulina, should be understood:

If you approve of this, hold with me that view of the holy man, Ambrose, that has now been confirmed not by his authority but by the truth itself. For I am not pleased with it just because the Lord set me free from error, especially through the words of that man, and granted me the grace of saving baptism through his ministry, as if I were favouring him too much as the one who planted and watered me (cf. 1 Cor 3, 6).<sup>185</sup>

As I will show in the next chapter, the image of planting and watering recalls other instances in Augustine, where the passage of 1 Cor 3, 6 (*"Ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit; sed Deus incrementum dedit"*), is used in connection with the catechumenate and baptismal preparation in controversies with Donatists over the role of the administrator of baptism. The reference to Paul shows that Augustine wanted to prevent his readers from thinking that he used Ambrose throughout his letter as an authority merely because he was baptised by him. Here, Augustine seems to react against the Donatists' emphasis on the worthiness of the minister in baptism. However, Augustine's position is ambiguous, both referring to Ambrose's authority and minimising his role as the administrator of baptism. Augustine's short remark is generic and it does not necessarily points to the pre-baptismal catechesis mentioned in the *De fide et operibus* as Courcelle had suggested.<sup>186</sup>

184 Augustine, *Ep.* 147, 6.17, 7.19 (against Photinians and Arians), 9.21–14.35, 16.39, 19.47–20.48, 23.52, 23.54 and *Ep.* 148, 2.6, 2.10, 3.12, 4.15.

185 Augustine, *Ep.* 147, 23.52: *"Quae si adprobas, tene mecum sancti viri Ambrosii sententiam iam non eius auctoritate sed ipsa veritate firmatam. Neque enim et mihi propterea placet, quia per illius os potissimum me dominus ab errore liberavit et per illius ministerium gratiam mihi baptismi salutaris indulsit, tamquam plantatori et rigatori meo nimum faveam"* (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 44 (1904), 328; Teske, *WSA* 11/2 (2003), 347).

186 For Courcelle (1968), 211–221 this teaching on Luke was received in 387 and not earlier because in *Conf.* VII, 19.25 he says that he has heard about the wrongs of Photinus only some time later. However, it is difficult to exactly match the exegeses quoted by Augustine with homilies actually preached by Ambrose and then even more difficult to try to date these homilies.

The *De fide et operibus* was written in 412–413 to refute unidentified opponents who argued that a profession of faith was enough before baptism, and who questioned the need for a full initiation process, rules of admission based on behaviour, and rites of penance. It is in this context, at the beginning of the work, that Augustine recalls the initiation received in Milan. He argues that the catechumenate is an essential period of preparation and refers to his own experience, asking his readers: “do we repress the testimony of our own experience so far as to forget how intent and anxious we were over what the catechists taught us when we were petitioning for the sacrament, and for precisely this reason were called *competentes*?”<sup>187</sup> This is the only passage in Augustine’s treatises clearly recalling the catechesis received as a *competens*, which, as we have seen, was particularly intense and focused on both faith (teaching of the creed) and works (teaching on morals) according to Ambrose. The remark is quite generic, with no specific detail about rituals and catechesis, as it simply aims to point at shared practice as a polemical argument. Nevertheless, connections to Ambrose’s catechesis can be highlighted if we consider the broader context in which Augustine recalls this experience. Augustine refers to his own initiation to argue in favour of a thorough examination of the behaviour of candidates, underlining that the pre-baptismal period is a particularly fitting time to learn about Christian morals.<sup>188</sup> This corresponds to Ambrose’s emphasis, in his catechesis, on ethics and moral teaching, based on Old Testament figures, and more broadly to his presentation of baptism as the beginning of a radical change of conduct. It can be said that both the letters and the *De fide et operibus* show how Augustine resorted to Ambrose to solve theological issues and engage in debates with opponents (the unnamed adversaries of the *De fide et operibus*, the Donatists), even before he started using his authority in the Pelagian controversy. These references thus provide a bridge between Augustine’s *Confessiones* and the later uses of Ambrose in anti-Pelagian polemics.

Indeed, Ambrose’s figure gains particular prominence in Augustine’s debates against Julian, as Augustine strives to show his connections to Italy and to claim Ambrose’s heritage against Pelagians—Pelagius had himself made use of

<sup>187</sup> Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9: “usque adeo dissimulamus a sensibus nostris, ut vel nos ipsos non recordemur, quam fuerimus adtentis atque sollicitis, quid nobis praeciperent, a quibus catechizabamur, cum fontis illius sacramenta peteremus atque ob hoc competentes etiam vocaremur?” (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 44; Liguori, *FOC* 27 (1955), 230).

<sup>188</sup> Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 8–9. The connections between the treatise and Augustine’s experience are highlighted in Folkemer, L.D., (1946b), *S. Aurelii Augustini De fide et operibus: a Translation, Edited with an Historical and Critical Introduction* (Hartford Theological Seminary, PhD. Thesis), 35–39.

Ambrose in his *De natura*. This brings Augustine to discuss his own initiation in Milan in two occasions. The first reference to Ambrose as the administrator of his baptism, whose exegesis should be followed by Pelagius and Julian, is found at the very end of the first book of Augustine's *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, written against Julian in 418–419. Augustine argues for both the goodness of marriage and the transmission of original sin to children through concupiscence and adds: “Blessed Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, by whose priestly ministry I received the bath of rebirth, briefly spoke of this concupiscence of the flesh, when, in commenting on Isaiah the prophet, he emphasised the birth of Christ in the flesh”.<sup>189</sup> This passage may point out, without certainty however, to catechesis received by Augustine. At least, Augustine's own initiation may have brought him to return to Ambrose's exegesis in this case. Isaiah, discussed in connection to Ambrose's commentary, was precisely the book recommended to Augustine by Ambrose when he was in Cassiciacum.<sup>190</sup> While the young Augustine failed to show any interest in the book, the old bishop reclaimed Ambrose's mentoring and exegesis in his fight against Julian.

In 421, in the first book of the *Contra Iulianum*, Augustine frequently resorts to Ambrose. When first mentioning the bishop, Augustine refers to his own initiation:

But listen again to another of God's excellent stewards, a man whom I revere as a father, for he gave me birth (*genuit*) in Christ through the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 4, 15) and by him as Christ's minister I received the bath of rebirth. I am speaking of blessed Ambrose; I myself have experienced his grace and constancy, the labors and the dangers he faced on behalf of the faith in words and in deeds, and the Roman world does not hesitate to celebrate them with me.<sup>191</sup>

189 Augustine, *Nupt. et conc.* 1, 35.40: “*De hac ergo carnis concupiscentia beatus Ambrosius Mediolanensis episcopus, cuius sacerdotali ministerio lavacrum regenerationis accepi, sic breviter est locutus, cum exponens Esaiam prophetam carnalem Christi nativitatē insinuat*” (Zycha, *CSEL* 42 (1902), 251; Teske, *WSA* 1/24 (1998), 52). For the dating: Lössl, J., (2012), ‘Nuptiis et concupiscentia (De –)’, *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 261–268, at 261–262.

190 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 4.12.

191 Augustine, *C. Iul.* I, 3.10: “*Sed adhuc audi alium excellentem dei dispensatorem, quem veneror ut patrem: in Christo enim Iesu per evangelium ipse me genuit, et eo Christi ministro lavacrum regenerationis accepi. Beatum loquor Ambrosium, cuius pro catholica fide gratiam, constantiam, labores, pericula, sive operibus sive sermonibus, et ipse sum expertus, et mecum non dubitat orbis praedicare romanus*” (*PL* 44 (1841), 645; Teske, *WSA* 1/24 (1998), 272). For the dating see Lancel (1999b), 583. There are numerous other references to Ambrose and his teaching in the treatise, see *C. Iul.* I, 4.11, 6.22, 7.30, 7.34–35, 9.44–45; II, 2.4–3.5, 4.8–6.15, 7.19–8.24, 8.30, 9.32–10.37; III, 1.2, 14.28, 17.32, 21.48; VI, 23.70.

The reference to Ambrose giving birth (*genuit*) to Augustine in the Gospel is particularly interesting: it cannot mean baptism, which is mentioned later, but may well refer again to the preparation for baptism,<sup>192</sup> although it could allude to preaching heard by Augustine in general, in connection to the account in the *Confessiones* underlining the significance of Ambrose in his conversion journey. There are no other references to Augustine's initiation in the later anti-Pelagian works, culminating with his second unfinished refutation of Julian, despite frequent references to Ambrose.<sup>193</sup>

The last time Augustine referred to his time of preparation as a *competens* was when he indicated in the *Retractationes* (written around 426–427), that he wrote the *De immortalitate animae*, the *De grammatica*, and the *De Musica* in Milan, after his return from Cassiciacum, thus while preparing for baptism.<sup>194</sup> These works, however, do not contain references to his preparation. Although the focus on liberal arts at the time of the pre-baptismal preparation has been sometimes used by scholars as proof of Augustine's little interest in Christianity just before baptism,<sup>195</sup> this parallel literary activity only shows that Augustine pursued his work begun at Cassiciacum when he returned to Milan accompanied by his friends and relatives. While such mixed interests did not fail to meet with the disapproval of the old Augustine, we do not need to see them as incompatible with a deeper involvement in Christian rituals and teaching before baptism.<sup>196</sup>

In summary, while Ambrose's writings show that the preparation for baptism in Milan included frequent teaching on morals and on the creed, as well as examination rituals, designed to progressively integrate candidates ritually, the account of the *Confessiones* is particularly uninformative. Reasons for this shortness have been sought in the *disciplina arcani*, the polemics against Donatists—as shown in a sermon against the Donatists, Augustine underlining the collective effort of preparation to reject accusations of being

192 Courcelle (1968) 211–221.

193 See Grossi, V., (2004), 'Il ricorso ad Ambrogio nell'opus imperfectum contra Iulianum di Agostino d'Ippona', in Nazzaro, A.V., (ed.), (2004), *Giuliano d'Eclano e l'Hirpinia Christiana. Atti del convegno 4–6 giugno 2003* (Napoli), 115–156; Lamberigts, M., (2010), 'Augustine's use of tradition in the controversy with Julian of Aeclanum', *Augustiniana* 60, 11–61, esp. 29–31; Ribreau, M., BA 25A–B, n.c. 8 ('Ambroise'), forthcoming.

194 Augustine, *Retr.* 1, 5.1: "Post libros soliloquiorum iam de agro Mediolanum reversus scripsi librum de immortalitate animae" and 1, 6: "Per idem tempus, quo Mediolani fui baptismum percepturus, etiam disciplinarum libros conatus sum scribere" (Mutzenbecher, *CSEL* 57 (1984), 15 and 17).

195 See the overview in Madec (1989).

196 Augustine, *Retr.*, Prol. 3.



a Manichaean—or the position of Augustine in 386–387. However, it is more likely that Augustine's account simply reflects the specific aims of the work, concentrating on the links between conversion, the power of baptism and God's grace rather than details about the rituals. In this sense, while Augustine himself preferred to focus on the deeper meaning of this ritual transformation, Ambrose's evidence provides a useful background to understand what Augustine might have experienced. Beyond the *Confessiones*, from the 410s onwards, Augustine employed his own experience and particularly the teaching and authority of Ambrose as the bishop who baptised him as a guide to solve difficult questions and as a weapon against opponents: first in letters exchanged about the vision of God in 411–413, then again about the significance of pre-baptismal moral teaching against opponents in the *De fide et operibus*, and finally in the fight against Julian of Aeclanum in the context of the Pelagian controversy, in the later 410s and early 420s. Finally, towards the end of his life, looking back at the first works he wrote, the bishop last recalled his baptismal preparation, keeping a critical eye on the interest shown for liberal arts in works written as a candidate to baptism in Lent 387.

## 5 Conclusion

In general, and in particular for the *Confessiones*, when recalling his own catechumenate, Augustine not only accurately informs his audience about himself—the evidence shows continuity in the way his own experience is told—but also makes full use of the narrative to address specific concerns, depending on the changing context in which he is writing. His Christian upbringing, the following adhesion to Manichaeism and his return to the status of catechumen in Milan are recalled in the writings of Cassiciacum, at the time of his priesthood and in the *Confessiones* in similar terms, thus showing consistence in Augustine's works from 386 to the *Confessiones*. However, a progressive change of focus and terminology is visible in the writings of the cleric: Augustine refers to his status of catechumen with the technical terminology of religious belonging and emphasises his involvement in the Church, both in Africa and in Milan, particularly in the *Confessiones*. The adhesion to Manichaeism is also reassessed with a milder view, to demonstrate that for a young Christian in Africa falling into Manichaeism was both understandable and temporary. The *Confessiones*, the only source to follow Augustine's connections to Christianity after his conversion to Manichaeism, relate two baptismal episodes stressing the distance between Manichaeism and the Christianity of his youth, perhaps to demonstrate to his Christian opponents, particularly the Donatists, that he

was not baptised as a Manichaean. Indirectly, Augustine's aim to construct a rigid presentation of his adhesion to Manichaeism and rejection of Christian baptism shows that religious affiliation in his youth was porous and allowed flexibility. The initiation in Milan is consistently presented from 386 to the *Confessiones* as a return to the African catechumenate, while the writings of the cleric, and particularly the *Confessiones*, also aim to demonstrate the significance of the catechumenate for the conversion process, thus addressing potential converts. In the *Confessiones* Augustine resorted to his experience to present a model of conversion, based on a progressive perfection of the self, both in terms of doctrine and behaviour. The activities of the catechumen in Cassiciacum, carried on in Milan while preparing for baptism are criticised in the *Confessiones* and the *Retractationes*, depicting Augustine as partially integrated and in need of liturgical preparation, baptism and further training to get a better grasp of Christianity. The *Confessiones* only offer a brief description of his baptismal preparation, focusing rather on the theological implication of baptism. Finally, starting from the 410s Augustine increasingly referred to Ambrose and his teaching, coming back to his own baptism in a variety of contexts as an argument in learned discussion and polemical debates.

Thus, Augustine's catechumenate is narrated in the context of religious controversies. The Donatist background appears intermittently, particularly through accusations of having been baptised as a Manichaean, the defence of his baptism outside Africa as a collective event, and the discretion displayed in describing his own baptism in the *Confessiones* and in the letters of 411–413. Augustine's stress on the mediocrity of his Christian education before the adhesion to Manichaeism and the sharp distinctions drawn between Manichaean hearers and catechumens are to be understood in the context of polemics against Manichaeans, which are central to the works of the priesthood but tend to become less relevant in the *Confessiones* and later. It has also been shown that there is a change of emphasis in Augustine's recollections of his catechumenate from the *Confessiones* onwards, now focusing on the baptismal preparation in Milan rather than on his time as a catechumen in Africa and Italy. This has to be related to Augustine's increasing resort to Ambrose's figure and writings in general, particularly during the Pelagian controversy.

Augustine cleverly used his past to exhort readers to adhere to his views and wrote about his catechumenate with two main and specific goals: first, to show through his own life how the lives of other catechumens and baptised Christians could be perfected; second, to build a powerful tool in polemical writings which he could use not only to defend himself, but to build authoritative arguments against opponents. I would argue that the growing interest in his African initiation up to the *Confessiones* and the change of emphasis

in his later recollections are not the result of radically new developments of his thought but rather correspond to the adjustment to changing contexts and readerships as a cleric. As it has been hinted in this chapter and will be better shown in the next three chapters, what Augustine said about himself often matches what he said in general in his preaching, as a result of the dialogue between the experiences of the young catechumen and the cleric presiding over the catechumenate. However, it appears that the early 400s are a turning point in Augustine's recollections: the *Confessiones* provide Augustine's last discussion of his African background as a catechumen. While Augustine turned to *catechumeni* starting from his own experience, he gradually developed broader lines of thought as an African cleric in charge of the initiation.

Despite the specific contexts and purposes of his recollections, this study also aimed to demonstrate that Augustine's account should not be mistrusted but provides many insights on his catechumenate. A concrete picture of Augustine as a catechumen emerges: he was born and raised in a Christian environment, then, contrary to what is generally stated in scholarship, he most likely became a catechumen as a boy, probably between seven and twelve years of age. He grew up praying, learning about God and going to church, and his initiation probably took place close to the time of his mother's baptism and some time before the enrolment of his father as a catechumen. In Carthage, he attended church services and turned to the Bible for answers. As a Manichaean, his narrative in the *Confessiones* shows that he was never as distant from Christianity as he would have liked to emphasise. After abandoning Manichaeism in Italy, he aimed at reconnecting with his youth and chose therefore to adhere to the Church of Ambrose. He became progressively involved in the Christian community and wrote a letter intended as a formal renunciation of Manichaeism, opening the way for his baptismal preparation at Lent during which he received special rituals and catechesis with a particular focus on morals, which he would recall and recommend years later. It is difficult to say whether Augustine's *parcours* was typical: while many features of his catechumenate can be found elsewhere, the sum of his experiences and the way they are told are unique. A broader study of the catechumenate in Africa, still largely depending on Augustine as our main source, will help refine our understanding of this process of integration and demonstrate the variety of practices and the centrality of the catechumenate in Christian polemics.

## The Practices and Status of *catechumeni* in Augustine's Community

The study of Augustine's recollections about his own experience has offered first insights into the catechumenate of an exceptionally well-known individual. However, beyond Augustine's own experience, *catechumeni* remain a largely unknown group and category within late antique Christianity. This chapter therefore aims to study more broadly what it meant, for Augustine and his contemporaries, to be a catechumen in a Christian community. It focuses on the practicalities of the catechumenate witnessed by Augustine during his life as an influential cleric of North Africa between the 390s and 430. In the preceding chapter, it has been shown that Augustine's recollections of his time as a *catechumenus* are told in a context of religious polemics and culminate with the *Confessiones*. This chapter follows this thread and focuses on how Augustine, progressively leaving his own past behind, started to provide broader guidance on how catechumens should be taught, particularly in the *De catechizandis rudibus* and the *Contra Faustum* written in the early 400s. Rather than only resorting to his personal trajectory, the priest and bishop also repeatedly employed the liturgy of initiation, which he witnessed and presided at, as an argument in polemics against Donatists and Pelagians.

Most of the available evidence on practices concerns the baptismal preparation, its special catechesis and rites in the weeks preceding Easter. Scholarship investigating Augustine as a source for the ancient catechumenate has therefore concentrated on this short and intensive preparation, which will be the focus of Chapter 4.<sup>1</sup> Augustine also constitutes a main source in early Christianity about the admission process into the catechumenate: his presentation of the admission, the rites and the first catechesis in the *De catechizandis rudibus* has thus attracted the interest of scholars.<sup>2</sup> Much less attention has been paid,

<sup>1</sup> See studies listed in the Introduction, note 44.

<sup>2</sup> Roetzer (1930), 137–143; Busch (1938), 404–423; Folkemer (1946a), 301–304; Monachino (1947), 165–173; van der Meer (1961), 353–357; Maertens (1962), 114–115 and 122–125; Poque, S., (transl. not.), *SC* 116 (1966), 22–23; de Latte (1975), 178–191; Latham, J.E., (1982), *The Religious Symbolism of Salt* (Paris), 98–103; Saxer (1988), 381–399; Cavallotto (1996), 164–194; Lamirande (1992a); Grossi (1993), 14–41 and 53–60; Gavrilyuk (2007), 278–287; Ferguson (2009), 779–780; Harmless (2014), 131–180; Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 202–204; Vopřada (2020), 106–110.

however, to the practices of *catechumeni* more broadly beyond the admission process, for which Augustine is a rare source of information. Augustine reflected on the correct way of catechising and giving rites to catechumens, he addressed them in his preaching and used them as examples in several of his treatises. This chapter seeks to renew existing studies by putting the evidence in its polemical context and focusing on the practices of *catechumeni* as a specific group, both at the admission and beyond. It aims at opening new avenues of research on the significance of catechumens in late antique Christian communities.

In the first part, starting from the admission process, its rites and teaching and the profiles of candidates, I highlight that most evidence relates to polemics against Donatists and Pelagians; I also suggest, extending earlier tentative hypotheses, that rites cannot be reduced to a single session of admission but may have been performed by ordinary catechumens after their admission.<sup>3</sup> In the second part, I then investigate the catechumens' special rites after the admission process, focusing on two main practices of the catechumens' membership: the signing of the forehead with the cross and the dismissal during mass related to the *disciplina arcani*, which underline respectively their inclusion and exclusion from the community and show the peculiar and ambiguous status of catechumens.<sup>4</sup> Augustine was well aware that catechumens constituted a crucial group in the fight against rival religious communities and for the negotiation of the identity and boundaries of his own community. He paid careful attention to their initiation, and at the same time, used the rites performed on catechumens as a tool in controversies to prove theological points. Thus, investigating the practices of catechumens in Augustine more broadly offers a peculiar viewpoint to study Augustine's career and controversies.

3 The repetition of the giving of salt has been denied by Klöckener, M., (1998), 'Die Bedeutung der neu entdeckten Augustinus-Predigten (*Sermones Dolbeau*) für die liturgiegeschichtliche Forschung', in Madec (1998), 129–170 at 155–156. However the mention of the rite in canon 3 of the council of Hippo (on which see Chapter 5) has led scholars to rightly argue that it was repeated after the admission: Mayer (1868), 63–65 (who suggests that other admission rites were also repeated); Duchesne (1925), 314 n. 1; Dölger (1909), 99; de Puniet (1925), 2596; van der Meer (1961), 356; Righetti (1988), 64; Madec, G., *BA* 11/1 (1991), 266–267; Gavriluk (2007), 287; Harmless (2014), 174 n. 157 and 224; Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 202–203. Busch (1938), 386 suggested that Augustine received the sign of the cross repeatedly as a catechumen. Monachino (1947), 168 already noted, as I will here suggest, that the rites of admission were perhaps repeated at the dismissal.

4 Harmless (2014), 184 noted that these two practices were often stressed in Augustine's turns to catechumens.

## 1 Practices of Admission into the Catechumenate and Their Polemical Background

In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine tells that the deacon of Carthage, Deogratias, wrote to ask him for help in dealing with candidates to the catechumenate, who are called *rudes* in reference to their being uninitiated.<sup>5</sup> Augustine's reply is divided into two parts: first an answer to the doubts of Deogratias concerning the correct way of giving the *narratio*—presentation of Bible history—outlining general principles of catechesis, then two examples of speeches, one long and one short.<sup>6</sup> Between the first and the second part, Augustine describes the solemn rite that, as I will show, makes the candidate a member of the Church as a *catechumenus*. The treatise should be situated in the early 400s, perhaps in connection with Augustine's preaching campaign in Carthage in the winter 403–404, because of the parallel development of the new theme of the two cities in this treatise and in a series of sermons preached in Carthage in that period.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that Augustine enjoyed a prominent position in the African churches, which explains why he was consulted.<sup>8</sup> His involvement in the instruction of catechumens in Carthage, however, has been less noticed.<sup>9</sup> Not only it is well known that Augustine frequently travelled to

5 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 1, 1: “Petisti me, frater Deogratias, ut aliquid ad te de catechizandis rudibus, quod tibi usui esset, scriberem” (Bauer, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 121). For a discussion of this term see Cordovani, R., (1966), ‘Il *De catechizandis rudibus* di s. Agostino. Questioni di contenuto e di stile’, *Augustinianum* 6, 489–527, esp. 489–505. It should be noted that the Manichaean Faustus also employs the term to refer to the initiation of new candidates called *infantes* (probably in a symbolic way): C. Faust. XXIV, 1: “Unde omnis etiam religio et maxime christiana ad sacramentum rudes infantes appellat. Quod et ipsum significans apostolus ait: filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis (Gal 4, 19)” (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 718).

6 Respectively Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 16, 24–25, 49 and 26, 51–27, 55. For a study of the place of the Bible in Augustine's first catechesis see Pignot, M., ‘La Bible dans la première catéchèse aux nouveaux convertis: le cas du *De catechizandis rudibus* d’Augustin d’Hippone’, in Gounelle, R., (ed.), *La Bible dans les catéchèses des IV<sup>e</sup> et V<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica (Turnhout), forthcoming.

7 For this dating hypothesis: Hombert (2000), 41–44. The dating around 400 is unsure because of the problematic position of the treatise in Augustine, *Retr.* 11, 14 (between *Adn. Iob.* and *Trin.*, and after *C. Fel.* dated to December 404). See more details in Madec, G., *BA* 11/1 (1991), 233–237; Mayer, C., (1992), ‘Catechizandis rudibus (De –)’, *AL* 1, fasc. 5/6, 794–805 at 795–796; Madec, G., (1996), *Introduction aux “Révisions” et à la lecture des œuvres de saint Augustin* (Paris), 147–157.

8 Deogratias asked at least another time for Augustine's help: Augustine, *Ep.* 102 replied to queries from a pagan sent by the deacon.

9 Scholars generally suggest that Augustine only initiated catechumens in Hippo, however this has to be open to debate, see Pignot (2018), 111 n. 132.

Carthage to preach, but the detailed exploration of Augustine's texts about catechumens shows that on several occasions during his life he took special care of them in Carthage. The *De catechizandis rudibus* is therefore the first and clearest evidence about this involvement in the early 400s, going hand in hand with other interventions in Carthage, in sermons, and perhaps as well particularly in 412–413 when Augustine wrote about the catechumenate in the *De fide et operibus*.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as we will see in Chapter 3, in the late 420s, letters exchanged between Augustine and the Carthaginian aristocrat Firmus show that the bishop employed his letters and works to instruct catechumens in Carthage and bring them to baptism.<sup>11</sup> Thus, when writing the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine was not acting as a distant expert.<sup>12</sup>

Seeing the need of local clerics like Deogratias to be trained in such a difficult task, Augustine took the opportunity to provide a synthesis on the first catechesis for newcomers that includes unique details about the admission process. Augustine's treatise, which reveals his concrete techniques of catechesis, is a remarkably practical guide giving insights into the process of admission and the perspective of the catechist. The catechetical discourse, particularly its pedagogy, and the rites related to the catechesis have therefore been thoroughly studied and analysed.<sup>13</sup> I here only focus on the concrete practices of admission, looking at the way in which this first session worked as a combination of catechesis and rites of incorporation, before complementing the analysis of the work with other lesser-known writings.

10 See Pignot (2019) and, on *F. et op.*, Pignot (2018).

11 Augustine, *Ep.* 1A\* and 2\* (respectively around 426–427 and 427–428). See Divjak, J., *BA* 46B (1987), 7–32 and 424–429, and a more detailed study of these and other letters to catechumens in Pignot, M., (2016): 'Questioning Baptism: Insights from Augustine's Correspondence', *RHE* 111/3–4, 452–482.

12 A hundred years later, Fulgentius acted as the expert on initiation solicited by the deacon of Carthage Ferrandus, remarkably mirroring Augustine's exchange with Deogratias. However, the perspective was different, as we will see in Chapter 6.

13 The bibliography is vast and cannot be presented here (on the admission process see note 2). On the treatise see in particular, with further bibliography: Christopher, J.P., (1926), *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi De catechizandis rudibus. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (Washington DC); Cordovani (1966); Daniélou-du Charlat (1968), 229–262; Cordovani, R., (1968), 'Lo stile nel "De catechizandis rudibus" di S. Agostino', *Augustinianum* 8/2, 280–311; Belche, J.-P., (1977, 1978, 1979, 1982), 'Die Bekehrung zum Christentum nach des hl. Augustinus Büchlein "De cat. rud."', *Augustiniana* 27, 26–69; 28, 255–287; 29, 247–279; 32, 42–87 and 282–311; Reil, E., (1989), *Aurelius Augustinus 'De catechizandis rudibus': ein religionsdidaktisches Konzept* (St Ottilien); Madec, G., *BA* 11/1 (1991), 9–41 and 233–267; Mayer (1992); Domínguez, C.M., (2005), 'La catequesis pastoral en san Agustín. Estudio del método catequístico agustiniano en *De catechizandis rudibus*', *Augustinus* 50/196–197, 29–89; Pasquato (2006), 925–926.

### 1.1 *The First Catechesis*

The first contact between the catechist and newcomers starts with a dialogue, meant to build a relationship and adapt the catechesis: Augustine recommends that catechists—who seem to be clerics, as is the case of Deogratias and Augustine, although nothing is specified—should tailor the catechesis to the candidate's profile, if possible by asking others who know the candidate's motives to become a Christian, otherwise asking the candidate directly.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the candidate's decision to convert was often the result of interactions with other Christians and at the same time that these Christians could act as sponsors.

Further details are provided in the course of Augustine's explanation. First, the bishop notes that it is better for candidates to be seated to avoid tiredness and boredom. Augustine particularly recalls the case of a man from the countryside who left in the middle of the catechesis because he was too tired.<sup>15</sup> Thus, this is added as a special recommendation and it seems plausible that usually listeners did not sit to hear the catechesis. Augustine also notes that seating is better when there are only a few listeners to be initiated, a situation which cannot be compared to ordinary preaching in front a bigger crowd standing. The first catechesis gathered small groups of candidates, from a single one-to-one meeting to a few hearers, perhaps including sponsors.<sup>16</sup>

The candidates' profile could vary, while Augustine notes that Deogratias will often deal with ignorants (*idiotae*) from the city, whom Augustine has in mind when he prepares the long model of catechesis.<sup>17</sup> Beyond this main category, Augustine discusses two kinds of hearers that deserve special attention, advising Deogratias to adapt the catechesis accordingly. First, there are those learned in liberal arts, who already have a good knowledge of Christianity through books and should only be instructed with a short speech. Augustine

14 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 5, 9: "*Utile est sane, ut praemoneamur antea, si fieri potest, ab his qui eum norunt, in quo statu animi sit, vel quibus causis commotus ad suscipiendam religionem venerit. Quod si defuerit alius a quod id noverimus, etiam ipse interrogandus est*" (Bauer, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 129–130). On the teaching deacon see Jaskiewicz, S., (2010), 'Il diacono catecheta sulla base dell'opera *De catechizandis rudibus* di Sant'Agostino', in *Diakonia, diaconiae, diaconato. Semantica e storia nei Padri della Chiesa. XXXVIII Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana, Roma, 7–9 maggio 2009* (Rome), 423–432.

15 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 13, 19.

16 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 13, 19: "*Nam cum unus aut duo aut pauci, qui propterea venerunt ut christiani fiant, periculose loquimur stantibus*" (Bauer, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 143).

17 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 16, 24: "*Sed tamen faciamus aliquem venisse ad nos qui vult esse christianus et de genere quidem idiotarum, non tamen rusticanorum, sed urbanorum, quales apud carthaginem plures experiri te necesse est*" (Bauer, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 148).



underlines the need to gather information about the books that brought them to convert, rejecting any heretical teaching.<sup>18</sup> This discussion shows the importance of books in the process of conversion for learned individuals. Second, between ignorants and the most learned, Augustine identifies a middle category, those trained in schools of grammar and rhetoric: they need to be exhorted to earnestly read the Bible in order to make a difference between the art of eloquence and the depth of truth.<sup>19</sup> He advises Deogratias to unfold the hidden meaning of the Bible and thus resort to allegorical readings of biblical episodes, which add complexity and provide a way to raise new interest among converts—this was famously the case of Augustine himself as told in the *Confessiones*.<sup>20</sup> The approach recommended by Augustine is applied in the models attached to the treatise, which display allegorical readings of key episodes.<sup>21</sup> Beyond these different profiles, Augustine explains that the first catechesis should always start by asking the candidates about their motivation to convert and build the whole speech on it, even if the candidates lie to hide shameful reasons. The objective, by praising the initiative to convert, whatever the

- 18 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 8, 12: "*si ad te quisquam catechizandus venerit liberalibus doctrinis excultus qui iam decreverit esse christianus, et ideo venerit ut fiat, difficillimum omnino est, ut non multa nostrarum scripturarum litterarumque cognoverit. [...] Cum his itaque breviter agendum est [...] Si autem in alicuius haeretici volumina incurrit [...] sedulo edocendus est, praelata auctoritate uniuersalis ecclesiae aliorumque doctissimorum hominum et disputationibus et scriptionibus in eius veritate florentium*" (Bauer, CCL 46 (1969), 133–134).
- 19 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 9.13: "*Sunt item quidam de scholis usitatissimis grammaticorum oratorumque venientes, quos neque inter idiotas numerare audeas, neque inter illos doctissimos, quorum mens magnarum rerum est exercitata quaestionibus. [...]. Maxime autem isti docendi sunt scripturas audire diuinas, ne sordeat eis solidum eloquium, quia non est inflatum*" (Bauer, CCL 46 (1969), 135). On the opposition between eloquence and the message see Harrison, C., (2014), 'Playing Ball: Augustine and Plutarch on Capturing Wisdom', in Harrison, C., Humfress, C., Sandwell, I., (eds.), (2014), *Being Christian in Late Antiquity. A Festschrift for Gillian Clark* (Oxford), 90–105.
- 20 See Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 9, 13: "*deque ipsa utilitate secreti unde etiam mysteria vocantur quid valeant aenigmatum latebrae ad amorem veritatis acuendum discutiendumque fastidii torporem, ipsa experientia probandum est talibus, cum aliquid eis quod in promptu positum non ita movebat enodatione allegoriae alicuius eruitur*" (Bauer, CCL 46 (1969), 135); see also 12.18; 26.50. On the protreptic function of allegory see Pépin, J., (1958), 'Saint Augustin et la fonction protreptique de l'allégorie', *RecAug* 1, 243–286 (esp. 250–253); Mayer, C., (1986), 'Aenigma' and 'Allegoria', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 140–141 and 233–239; Poland, L.M., (1988), 'Augustine, Allegory, and Conversion', *Journal of Literature and Theology* 2/1, 37–48; Dawson, D., 'Figure, allegory', in Fitzgerald (1999a), 365–368; Bochet, I., (2004), *Le Firmament de l'Écriture. L'herméneutique augustinienne* (Paris), 39–43.
- 21 See for instance the allegorical reading of God's writing of the Law on stone tablets (Ex 31, 18) in *Cat. rud.* 20, 35.

reason, is to bring them to think differently about their move and see the true value of conversion.<sup>22</sup> Augustine explains that common motives particularly included fear, dreams and miracles.<sup>23</sup> It seems likely that catechists would frequently use such powerful motives to their advantage, building their teaching on manifestations of God's power. In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine is reluctant to endorse such methods and notes that candidates should be led to focus on Scripture rather than miracles as proof of God's wonders.<sup>24</sup>

This brief dialogue with the candidate is followed by a lecture (*narratio*) on the history of salvation from creation to Augustine's time, which constitutes the main point of the catechesis on which Deogratias expressed doubts. Quoting 1 Tim 1, 5, Augustine explains that the catechist should highlight that love is the common thread of this history and that its convergence and accomplishment is in the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ.<sup>25</sup> The whole lecture gives great weight to the typological reading of the Bible, presenting the history of mankind as the accomplishment of prophecies foretold in the sacred text.<sup>26</sup> Augustine's focus on the *narratio*, a term used in classical oratory, as a summary of the history of salvation, starting from Creation and the episodes told in the Old Testament, through to the New Testament and early Christian times, finds parallels in late antique pre-baptismal catechesis, notably in hagiographical narratives from Italy and in Egeria's account about catechesis in Jerusalem—while Ambrose's teaching to candidates to baptism also focused on the deeds of Old Testament Patriarchs.<sup>27</sup> However, Augustine's discussion of the *narratio* in the context of the first catechesis is unique, as no extant evidence is available to compare it with.

For Augustine, the catechesis should also include a discussion of important aspects that might be of a particularly sensitive nature for a newcomer, such as the Christian belief in the resurrection of the flesh and the need to fol-

22 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 5, 9.

23 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 6, 10; see a discussion of this aspect in Harmless (2014), 135–148.

24 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 6, 10. Augustine would change his mind in later works promoting baptism, see Chapter 3, 3, pp. 169–175.

25 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 3, 6–5, 9. See Uhle, T., (2012), 'Narratio', *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 148–150.

26 See Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 3, 6 and 4, 7–8 in particular.

27 See notably the martyrdom accounts of Sebastianus (BHL 7543) and Caecilia (BHL 1495)—considered to be the work of Ambrosius the Younger by C. Lanéry, see with bibliography: Lanéry, C., (2010), 'Hagiographie d'Italie. 1. Les Passions latines composées en Italie', in Philippart, G., (ed.), (2010), *Hagiographies. Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550*, volume 5 (Turnhout), 15–369, at 68–80 and 80–88—; Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46; Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* I, 1. For further discussion of different types of catechesis see Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 422–496.

low strict rules of behaviour as a Christian.<sup>28</sup> Augustine insists on the need to end the catechesis by making sure that candidates are aware that the Church is made of good and bad and that it was foretold in the Bible. Thus the catechesis should present the rules of behaviour to be followed, warn candidates about bad behaviour in the community—fornication, drunkenness, attending shows, consulting astrologers etc.—and point to the virtuous example of good Christians.<sup>29</sup> Between the first part of the work (1, 1 to 9, 13) devoted to general principles of catechesis, and the two models of catechesis (16, 24 to 25, 49 and 26, 51 to 27, 55), Augustine also provides further advice on how to avoid boredom when in charge of the repetitive task of instructing newcomers, including particularly interesting thoughts about pedagogy, language and the limits of speech (10, 16 to 15, 23).<sup>30</sup> Despite the originality of Augustine's self assessment and deep reflection on speech and language, it has been shown that his principles of catechesis can be understood in connection to the rules of ancient rhetoric and particularly the Ciceronian traditional set speech.<sup>31</sup> These principles end with the advice to adapt any written model to the concrete situation and the oral nature of catechesis.<sup>32</sup>

#### 1.1.1 A Parallel in the *Contra Faustum*

While this practical guide has received considerable attention, it is remarkable that Augustine had already touched upon several aspects of the first catechesis in less known remarks of the *Contra Faustum* that call for comparison.<sup>33</sup> In this polemical dialogue, or *disputatio*, composed at an uncertain date, most probably between 398 and 403, thus at around the same period as the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine replies at length, in the form of a fictive dialogue, to statements from the *Capitula* written by the now-dead Manichaean of Milevis.<sup>34</sup> He explains how newcomers are to be taught, suggests an

28 On contemporary criticism of the belief in the resurrection of the flesh see Madec, *BA* 11/1 (1991), 263–265.

29 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 7, 11–9, 13; 14, 21 and 25, 46–48.

30 On these aspects see studies quoted note 13 and Chin, C., (2006), 'Telling Boring Stories: Time, Narrative and Pedagogy in the *De catechizandis rudibus*', *AugStud* 37/1, 43–62.

31 I do not insist here on these aspects, see a detailed discussion in Harmless (2014), 149–164.

32 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 15, 23. On the two models, see Etchegaray Cruz, A., (1971), 'Kerigma y teología de la evangelización en el 'De catechizandus rudibus'. Tradición y originalidad', *Augustinus* 16, 47–67; Harmless (2014), 164–175.

33 Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII. It is not mentioned in the studies quoted in note 2, except in passing by Busch (1938), 407–408 n. 36 and Harmless (2014), 132 n. 4, as well as in Etchegaray Cruz (1971), 47.

34 The composition of the work made of 33 books might have extended over a number of years. An updated overview of available evidence suggests a broad dating between

example of first catechesis, and summarises how it should work. Significantly, before departing for Italy, Augustine had met Faustus in Carthage, expecting to receive guidance from him that would clear his doubts about Manichaeism.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Faustus was eagerly awaited by Augustine the hearer, in a way that may not be too distant from what would be expected from catechists in Carthage. Augustine's refutation of Faustus' views on catechesis is a rejection of the Manichaean's authority as a teacher and the early development of Augustine's own principles of catechesis.

The *Contra Faustum* dismisses Faustus' distinction between the Old and the New Testament and his rejection of the Jewish roots of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> In the twelfth book, Augustine argues against Faustus' refusal to accept Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Christ and describes the main episodes of sacred history prefiguring Christ's coming, in terms that recall the presentation in the *De catechizandis rudibus*.<sup>37</sup> This debate, in the thirteenth book, comes to the question of the relevance of Jewish prophets for the first catechesis given to pagan candidates. Faustus pictures a fictive first session in which, as he aims to show, the catechist fails to convince a pagan to believe in Christ through the authority of Jewish prophets. He suggests that pagans rather convert on the basis of personal belief: only pagan prophecies on Christ may help them adhering to their new religion.<sup>38</sup> In his refutation, Augustine opposes Mani-

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398–403, see Dulaey, *BA* 18/A (2018), 9–15. Decret, F., (2003a), 'Faustum Manicheum (Contra –)', *AL* 2, fasc. 7/8, 1244–1252 at 1245 suggested 400–404, while Hombert (2000), 25–29 favoured 400–402.

35 See Augustine, *Conf.* v, 6.11. On Faustus: Decret (1970), 56–70; Decret (1978), 361–363 and Decret, F., (2003b), 'Faustus Manichaeus', *AL* 2, fasc. 7/8, 1252–1255.

36 On these *Capitula* and Manichaeans, see Monceaux, P., (1924), 'Le Manichéen Faustus de Milev: Restitution de ses Capitula', *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 43, 1–111; Decret (1970; 2003); Wurst, G., (2001), 'Bemerkungen zu Struktur und Genus *Litterarium* der *Capitula* des Faustus von Mileve', in van Oort-Wermelinger-Wurst (2001), 307–324; BeDuhn (2009), 106–134; Massie, A., (2011), *Peuple prophétique et nation témoin. Le peuple juif dans le Contra Faustum manichaeum de saint Augustin* (Paris); Dulaey, M., (dir.), with Bochet, I., Dubois, J.-D., Massie, A., Perrin, M.-Y., Wurst, G., *BA* 18A (2018), 9–84 (general bibliography at 35–40) and *BA* 18B (forthcoming in 2020).

37 Augustine, *C. Faust.* xii, in particular the typologies of the Flood (xii, 14–20) and of Moses leading his people out of Egypt (xii, 28–30).

38 Faustus in Augustine, *C. Faust.* xiii, 1: "Ita totum nulli alii quam suae fidae debet, quicumque fit ex gentibus christianus. Atque ut exemplo fiat, id, quod dicimus, apertius, ponamus aliquem nunc a nobis catechizari gentilem [...]. Rursum illo quaerente, quibus prophetis, nos respondeamus hebraeis. Atque ille subridens dicat: sed his ego minime credo. [...] Ita nihil, ut dixi, ecclesiae christianae hebraeorum testimonia conferunt, quae magis constet ex gentibus quam ex iudaeis" (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 378). Faustus' fictive dialogue here described might also constitute a source to suggest that Manichaeans, as has been noted

chaeen teaching on Christ and asserts that all converts from paganism are routinely introduced to Christianity through the prophecies of the Old Testament.<sup>39</sup> Augustine also adds an interesting remark, stating that if Faustus failed to convince a pagan convert he would resort to books, which, however, would not strengthen his views but contradict them.<sup>40</sup> The focus on books to demonstrate the prophecies, while it was aimed at Manichaeans who refused the Old Testament and were known to have held their own sacred books in great regard—and may have used them for their catechesis—perhaps also points to the similar use of books shown to the candidates at the time of the first catechesis in Augustine's community.<sup>41</sup> In any case, for Augustine, pagans are only convinced through the authority of the canonical Christian books confirmed by the tradition of the Church. The first catechesis should focus on the fulfilled predictions of the Old Testament, notably the persecution of Christians, the conversion of kings and emperors to Christianity, and the destruction of pagan idols.<sup>42</sup> The Jewish roots of Christianity are essential since the ancient character and diffusion of the Old Testament, written by Jews, gives weight to the prophecies that it contains on Christ.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Augustine ends by mentioning that other difficulties should be openly addressed, such as the reasons why the Jews did not believe in the prophecies about Christ, why there are so many different heresies, and why the candidate should choose the "true" Church. Remarkably close to the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine argues that the catechesis is only convincing when the authority of the prophecies in the Bible is proved by first mentioning all the facts already predicted.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, he also

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in Chapter 2, had similar practices for making new members, starting with a first teaching, the content of which is here debated between Faustus and Augustine.

- 39 Ibid. XIII, 3: "*Nec attendat in nullis ecclesiis illa recitari, cum hebraei prophetae in omnibus gentibus clareant atque ad christianam salutem tanta fidelium examina adducant*" (Zycha, CSEL 25/1 (1891), 380). Augustine particularly emphasised the significance of the accomplishment of prophecies as an apologetic argument, notably using the rare pair "praedicta, impleta" see Dulaey, M., (2016), 'Praedicta—impleta' and 'Prophetae, prophetia', AL 4, fasc. 5/6, 865–868 and 939–951.
- 40 Augustine, C. Faust. XIII, 4: "*Non, opinor, homines producet, sed libros aperiet: quos non pro se, sed contra se apertos reperiet*" (Zycha, CSEL 25/1 (1891), 381); see also about Manichaean books XIII, 6.
- 41 See Augustine, C. Faust. XIII, 6: "*Haesitantibus vobis et quid respondeatis non inveniuntur tam multi et tam grandes et tam pretiosi codices vestri*" (Zycha, CSEL 25/1 (1891), 384). See Decret (1970), 115–116.
- 42 Ibid. XIII, 7–9.
- 43 Ibid. XIII, 10: "*Per eorum quippe codices probamus non a nobis tamquam de rerum eventu commonitis ista esse conscripta, sed olim in illo regno praedicta atque servata, nunc autem manifestata et impleta*" (Zycha, CSEL 25/1 (1891), 389–390).
- 44 Ibid. XIII, 11–14.

notes that after the catechesis is given, the candidate entering the Christian community receives moral instruction and learns that the Church is made of good and bad Christians.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the *De catechizandis rudibus* and the *Contra Faustum* provide rare, parallel, and close contemporary presentations of the first catechesis for newcomers. Augustine explains that the refutation of Faustus brought him to only briefly emphasise the significance of prophecies for the teaching of newcomers, while a more detailed treatment of this topic would be needed.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that Deogratias' questions precisely constituted the awaited opportunity to write this broader synthesis. If this is case, book XIII at least may be dated before the *De catechizandis rudibus*. Comparing the two works highlights, moreover, that the catechesis takes place in the context of interactions between rival religious groups of late antique Africa. Candidates were mainly taught from the books of the Bible—maybe also concretely shown to them as it seems to be the case for Manichaeans—as the primary material of catechesis, distinguished from other non-canonical writings. Moreover, the Jewish inheritance, underlined against Manichaean objections, brings Augustine to insist on the relevance of a typological reading: the bishop not only builds his speech on a skilful reading of the Scriptures but also on a nuanced account of the state of his community. Triumphal views are counterbalanced by the attention given to the behaviour of good and bad Christians, with the development of the theme of the two cities in the *De catechizandis rudibus*.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.1.2 The Emphasis on Moral Instruction: Further Evidence

It has to be underlined, particularly since existing scholarship does not focus on this aspect, that both treatises dwell on the significance of moral teaching to be imparted to newcomers, although no detailed discussion of rules of behaviour and the requirements for the admission of newly enrolled *catechumeni* is provided—but the treatises cannot be deemed to provide a complete over-

45 Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 16: "[...] *qua inbutus et in ecclesiae catholicae gremio fovendus conlocatus consequenter etiam moneretur, quos mores tenere deberet. Neque perturbaretur eorum multitudine, in quibus ea non inveniret, quae observare iuberetur*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 395).

46 Augustine, *C. Faust.* XIII, 16: "*Hic et talibus, quae nunc breviter tangimus, tunc forte pro necessitate depellendi veterum erroris aliquanto latius disputatis et robore uberius probationis adsertis [...]*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 395).

47 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 19, 31 and in general chapters 19–21. On the development of the theme: Luras, A., Rondet, H., (1953), 'Le thème des deux cités dans l'œuvre d'Augustin', in Rondet, H., Le Landais, M., Luras, A., Couturier, C., (1953), *Études augustiniennes* (Paris), 9–160; van Oort (1991), 108–123; Lancel (1999b), 562–566.

view of practices.<sup>48</sup> This emphasis on moral teaching is particularly interesting knowing that Augustine often refers to the broad opinion that catechumens, due to their partial integration, may be less liable to church discipline and rules of behaviour than the baptised. Significantly, this opinion is always discussed in connection to the transformation brought by baptism. In a sermon on Psalm 50, preached the 13th of August, perhaps in 413, in a letter to Romanianus, and in his explanation on Galatians, Augustine speaks against bad behaviour among baptised Christians and reminds them of their particular commitment compared to catechumens; in the *Confessiones*, he narrates his own failed baptism as a child, concluding that the commitment and cleansing of baptism may have kept him away from his later sinful life.<sup>49</sup> In his treatise on the Catholic and Manichaean ways of life, Augustine attributes the view that catechumens are allowed more than the baptised in terms of behaviour to Manichaeans: "Do not say anymore that catechumens are permitted to make use of their spouses but that the faithful are not, and that catechumens are permitted to have money but that the faithful are not".<sup>50</sup> In a sermon preached in Carthage on a Sunday, the 18th of June, Augustine discussed the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8, 1–11) and Jesus' forgiveness, connecting it to the forgiveness of baptism and addressing catechumens:

When that woman was brought up for adultery, she received a pardon, she was set free. Is it grievous to us that through baptism, through confession, by grace all people receive pardon for all their sins? But don't let anyone

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- 48 Rebillard (2012a), 67 concluded from the lack of evidence in *Cat. rud.* that no rules were in place. In Ps. 61, 23, mentioned as proof of individuals continuing to practice astrology before and after baptism in fact refers to a Christian who started to practice astrology after he became a *fidelis* ("seductus [...] cum esset fidelis", Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 39 (1956), 792).
- 49 Augustine, In Ps. 50, 1: "Neque enim loquimur de paganis, neque de Iudaeis, sed de christianis; neque de his adhuc catechumenis, sed de multis etiam baptizatis" (Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 38 (1956), 599; for the dating see Requin, *BA* 59B (2019), 401–403; *Ep.* 259, 3: "Cum esses non dicam catechumenus sed in errore nobiscum perniciosissimo constitutus iuuenis iunioribus nobis, ab hoc te vitio temperantissima voluntate correxeras, quo non post longum tempus sordidius revolutus deinde in extremo vitae periculo baptizatus non dicam te fidei sed etiam nobis ecce iam senibus et insuper episcopis nondum emendaris" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 613); *Gal.* 35: "Et tamen si deprehendatur quisquam vel catechumenus Iudaico ritu sabbatum observans tumultuatur ecclesia. Nunc autem innumerabiles de numero fidelium cum magna confidentia in faciem nobis dicunt: 'die post kalendas non proficiscor'" (Divjak, *CSEL* 84 (1971), 103–104); *Conf.* 1, 11.18. This view and some related passages are noted in Rebillard (2012a), 66–67 and Rebillard (2012b), 42–43.
- 50 Augustine, *Mor.* 1, 35.80: "Nolite iam dicere, catechumenis licere uti coniugibus, fidelibus autem non licere, catechumenis licere habere pecuniam, fidelibus autem non licere" (Bauer, *CSEL* 90 (1992), 86; Teske, *WSA* 1/19 (2006), 68 adapted).

now say, 'She received pardon. I am still a catechumen (*catechumenus*). I will commit adultery, because I am going to receive pardon in due course. Take me to be one with that woman. She confessed and was set free. Our God is good. Even if I sin, I confess to him and he will forgive me'. You are noticing his goodness, but think a bit about his justice. As goodness leads to pardon, so justice leads to punishment.<sup>51</sup>

Augustine rejects the idea that catechumens may feel free to commit sin in connection to his broader discussion of moral duties for the baptised and the forgiveness granted in baptism. Thus, while noting this common view, Augustine strongly disagrees with it. He is aware that individuals becoming catechumens may expect their commitment to rules of behaviour not to be as strict as that of the baptised Christians, but he precisely attempts to bring them to follow the same rules. Besides the few examples here discussed, Augustine often rebuked catechumens and aimed at including them in his moral preaching to the broader community—notably pointing to the shared rite of the cross put on the forehead, as we will see later on.<sup>52</sup>

This emphasis on behaviour leads to the hypothesis that rules of admission into the catechumenate may have been applied by Augustine. In the *De fide et operibus*, Augustine provided a polemical synthesis against opponents who argued for flexible admission rules to baptism—the debate in fact shows that rules for admission were still being defined in Africa at this period. Augustine replies that before being admitted to prepare for baptism, individuals should abandon adulterous relationships, prostitution, or working for civic games, shows, and dancing, a series of professions which were already regarded negatively in Roman society more broadly.<sup>53</sup> While the treatise clearly focuses on the admission to prepare for baptism, a closer analysis suggests

51 Augustine, *S.* 16A (= Denis 20), 6: "*Illa enim mulier, cum offerretur causa adulterii, accepit indulgentiam, liberata est. Onerosum nobis est, quoniam per baptismum, per confessionem, per gratiam accipiunt omnes omnium peccatorum suorum indulgentiam? Sed nemo nunc dicat: 'illa accepit indulgentiam. Ego adhuc catechumenus sum. Faciam adulteria, quoniam accepturus sum indulgentiam. Pone et me unum esse quemadmodum illa mulier. Confessa est, et liberata est. Deus noster bonus est. Et si peccavero, confiteor illi, et dimittet mihi'. Bonitatem ipsius attendis, sed iustitiam eius considera. Quomodo bonitatem ad indulgentiam, sic iustitiam ad poenam*" (Lambot, *CCSL* 41 (1961), 222; Hill, *WSA* 111/1, 351). For dating hypotheses favouring 405 or 411 see Perler-Maier (1969), 294 and Verbraken (1976), 164.

52 See the following sermons, further discussed later in this chapter: *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3; *Io. eu. tr.* 118, 5; *S.* 97A (= Bibl. cas. 11, 114–115), 3; 301A (= Denis 17), 8; 302, 3; 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 3.

53 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 8; 15, 24; 18, 33; 19, 35; 27, 49; later: *Adult. coniug.* 11, 16.16. See our discussion of these rules in Chapter 4, pp. 190–197.



that Augustine's concern for a moral instruction previous to baptism may have extended to include the *catechumeni*, particularly as he refers to the necessity of such instruction since the time of evangelisation and insists that no one would admit a newcomer without any previous control on behaviour.<sup>54</sup> Thus, it is plausible that for Augustine the moral requirements for admission to baptism in the *De fide et operibus* were set as well at the entrance into the catechumenate. This would fit with Augustine's concern for the moral instruction of catechumens in his preaching and in the first catechesis according to the *De catechizandis rudibus* and the *Contra Faustum*.<sup>55</sup>

This discipline would not be exceptional: rules were set at the admission into the catechumenate in the famous *Apostolic Tradition* and in the so-called canons of Elvira, both requiring candidates to abandon their former sinful way of life, singling out entertainment-related professions, prostitution, and relationships outside marriage.<sup>56</sup> These sources, as Augustine's treatises, show that the

54 See *F. et op.* 9, 14: "*Hoc est enim evangelizare Christum, non tantum dicere, quae sunt credenda de Christo, sed etiam quae observanda ei, qui accedit ad conpagem corporis Christi*"; *F. et op.* 12, 18.

55 I here summarise a point which is made in more detail in Pignot (2018), 97–107. For Harmless (2014), 295 n. 18 it is unclear if these requirements were applied at the admission. For an attempt to set these rules in the broader context of Roman society and particularly pagan cult, see Dickie, M.W., (2001), 'Exclusions from the Catechumenate: Continuity or Discontinuity with Pagan Cult?', *Numen* 48/4, 417–443, esp. 418–423. On moral requirements before baptism see also Dölger, F.J., (1932), 'Das Garantiewerk der Bekehrung als Bedingung und Sicherung bei der Annahme zur Taufe', *Antike und Christentum* 3, 260–277.

56 *Apostolic Tradition* 16 (Bausi (2011), § 12), also including further recommendations about the admission of teachers and soldiers and rejecting professions related to pagan cults and divination (these rules have inspired the later *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, 32); canons 44 (on prostitution) and 62 (on entertainment-related professions) following the numbering of the *Colección Canónica Hispana*. On the *Apostolic Tradition* and its different versions see the studies listed in Introduction, notes 35–37 and in connection to the catechumenate: Dujarier (1962), 197–213; Saxer (1988), 109–120; Gavriluk (2007), 99–115; Ferguson (2009), 327–333. The Spanish canons were wrongly considered, until recently, to have been promulgated at a "council of Elvira" in the early fourth century; however, it has been shown that they likely date from the later fourth century and afterwards; they were put together by the seventh century on the basis of heterogeneous collections. See, on the canons pertaining to catechumens, with bibliography on their complex transmission: Villela, P., (2013), 'Las estipulaciones pseudoilberitanas acerca de los catecúmenos', in *Lex et religio. XL Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana (Roma, 10–12 maggio 2012)* (Rome), 587–616 (esp. 591–596 and 597–598). The Ambrosiaster and Marius Victorinus, in their commentaries on Gal 6, 6, also include a moral exhortation for catechumens to imitate the good in their catechist but not the bad (as noted by Dulaey, M., (2014), 'Expliquer Paul dans la Rome de Damase. Le commentaire de l'Ambrosiaster sur l'Épître aux Galates', in Bochet, I., Fédou, M., (eds.), (2014), *L'exégèse patristique de l'Épître aux Galates* (Paris), 83–124 esp. 97).

catechumenate, since its very beginning, was intended to bring new recruits to share a set of common rules of behaviour and rituals. Clerics were required to deal with a variety of motives for becoming Christian that not necessarily matched Christian ideals and Augustine's treatises precisely had the objective to provide guidance in this complex process.

## 1.2 *Rites of Incorporation*

According to the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, when the candidate agreed to all points presented in the catechesis, he was ready to undergo a number of solemn rites:

You should of course sign him (*signandus*), with due ceremony, and deal with him in accordance with the custom of the Church (*ecclesiae more*). Certainly as to the rite (*de sacramento sane*) which he receives, when it has been well explained to him that the symbols of divine things are visible, but that invisible things are therein honoured, and this thing (*speciem*) when sanctified by the words of the blessing, is not to be regarded as it is in every-day use, he should likewise be told what is meant by the words (*sermo*) which he has heard, and what gives them taste (*concliat*), of which this thing is the symbol.<sup>57</sup>

This rare description of the ritual actions performed to admit a new candidate remains very allusive. The other most famous passage about these entrance rites is in the *Confessiones*, in which Augustine refers to his own experience.<sup>58</sup> In the *Confessiones* the rite is performed at an undetermined time on a boy, most probably on his mother's initiative, and includes a sign of the cross and a seasoning of salt. In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, it is an adult candidate who receives a *sacramentum* after his first catechesis, including a blessing formula (*sermo*), a marking and the giving of a *species*—some visible “thing”, difficult to translate. The marking clearly refers in both cases to the rite of signing the forehead with the cross, which I explore more in detail in the second part of

57 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 26, 50: “sollemniter utique signandus est et ecclesiae more tractandus. De sacramento sane quod accipit, cum ei bene commendatum fuerit, signacula quidem rerum divinarum esse visibilia, sed res ipsas invisibiles in eis honorari; nec sic habendam esse illam speciem benedictione sanctificatam, quemadmodum habetur in usu quolibet: dicendum etiam quid significet et sermo ille quem audiuit, quid in illo concliat, cuius illa res similitudinem gerit” (Bauer, CCL 46 (1969), 173; Christopher, J.P., ACW 2 (1946), 82 adapted; comments on *sacramentum* at 108–109 note 87 with bibliography).

58 Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.17.

this chapter. The mention of a *species* giving taste (*condiat*) seems to match the passage from the *Confessiones* and indicate that salt was given at the ceremony.

### 1.2.1 The Giving of Salt

Augustine's reference to the giving salt to catechumens at their admission, together with a mention of the same rite in a canon from the council of Hippo of 393—explored in Chapter 5—provide the earliest evidence for this rite in the West, which is never mentioned in Eastern sources. Outside Africa, the earliest source mentioning it is John's letter to Senarius, written in early sixth-century Rome—discussed in Chapter 6—where again the rite is said to be performed at the admission into the catechumenate and connected to the signing of foreheads with the cross.<sup>59</sup> Later sources of Roman origin or including Roman material also mention the rite, notably a Roman martyrdom account, the old Gelasian sacramentary and other related liturgical documents from the Early Middle Ages.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the rite is also discussed in seventh-century Spanish writers Isidore of Seville and Ildephonsus of Toledo: Isidore describes the practice as coming from “the Fathers” and connects it to the story of Lot's wife

59 John, *Epistula ad Senarium* 3: “Accipit etiam catechuminus benedictum sal in quo signatur, quia, sicut omnis caro sale condita servatur, ita sale sapientiae et praedicationis verbi dei mens fluctibus saeculi madida et fluxa conditur, ut ad soliditatem stabilitatis atque permanens digesto paenitus corruptionis humore divini salis suavitate perveniat” (Wilmart, A., (ed.), (1933), *Analecta reginensia* (Vatican City), 158–179, at 172).

60 *Passio Susannae* (BHL 7937), 9: “Tunc fecit eum catechumenum, et dedit ei medicinam, et dimisit eum”; 11: “Tunc fecit uxorem eius secundum consuetudinem et filios eius Alexandrum et Cutiam catechumenos et dedit eis medicinam sapientiae” (*Acta Sanctorum*, Febr. III (1658), 61–64, at 62–63): the *medicina sapientiae* can be inferred to be salt, as it is described in this way in the Gelasian sacramentary; *Sacramentarium Gelasianum* I, xxxi: “Benedictio salis dandum caticuminis. Exorcizo te, creatura salis [...]. Proinde rogamus te, domine Deus noster, ut haec creatura salis in nomene [sic] trinitatis efficiatur salutare sacramentum ad effugandum inimicum. Quem tu, domine, sanctificando sanctifices, benedicendo, benedicas, ut fiat omnibus accipientibus perfecta medicina permanens in visceribus eorum [...]. Post hanc orationem pones sal in ore infantis et dicis: Accipe ille sal sapientie propitiatur in vitam aeternam”; xxxii: “Benedictio post datam sale: Deus patrum nostrorum, deus universae conditor veritatis, te supplices exoramus, ut hunc famulum tuum respicere digneris propicius, ut hoc primum pabulum salis gustantem non deiciat esurire permittas, quo minus gybo expleatur caeleste [...]”; lxxi: “Item ad caticuminum ex pacano [sic] faciendum: [...] Inde vero, postquam gustaverit medicinam salis et ipse se signaverit, benedicis eum his verbis” (Mohlberg, L.C., (ed.), (1960), *Liber sacramentorum romanae ecclesiae ordinis anni circuli* (Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 316/Paris Bibl. Nat. 7193, 41/56) (Rome), 43–44 and 93); later related documents are: *Ordo romanus* XI, 5–6 describing the initiation rite; *Missale Bobbiense* 540–541 containing exorcism and blessing formulae for salt, notably quoting Mt 5, 13 and Col 4, 6 (Lowe, E.A., (1920), *The Bobbio Missal. A Gallican Mass-book* (London), 164–165).

transformed into a statue of salt after looking back (cf. Gn 19, 26), to highlight that the rite implies a commitment; Ildephonsus rather presents it as an old but unrequired practice, without biblical foundation.<sup>61</sup>

The origins of the rite are obscure and it is unsure whether it first developed as a specific African rite or was already more widespread in the late antique West—knowing how little evidence is preserved about the admission into the catechumenate beyond Augustine. Fine studies on the symbolism of salt in the Mediterranean and the Near East highlight that the use of salt was widespread in rituals, from traditional pre-Christian practices to Judaism.<sup>62</sup> Old Testament texts emphasise the importance of salt, which is required for all offerings to God (Lev 2, 13) and a symbol of God's covenant with its people (Num 18, 19; 2 Chr 13, 5). In the New Testament, Jesus' *logion* referring to disciples as salt of the earth and pointing to the worthlessness of salt that has lost its saltiness and is therefore thrown out (Mt 5, 13; with Mk 9, 50 and Lk 14, 34 similarly referring to salt but not identifying the disciples with it) may also have provided the connection with the Old Testament and the background for the use of salt in Christian initiation.<sup>63</sup> With the abolition of sacrifices, Jesus employs salt as

61 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 11, 21: "*De caticuminis, exorcismo et sale. Sales autem in ministerio caticuminis dando a patribus ideo est institutum, ut eorum gustu condimentum sapientiae percipiant, neque dispiant a sapore Christi, nec sint fatui et retro respiciant sicut uxor Loth, ne malum exemplum dantes ipsi remaneant et alios condiant, quemadmodum illae quae, cum liberaretur a Sodomis, in via posita retro respexit ibique remansit facta statua salis, quo signo condirentur hii qui per fidem mundo et actibus desiderisque eius renuntiant, ut affectionis pristinae non recordentur neque ad saeculi inlecebras revocentur, quia secundum salvatoris sententiam ponens manum suam super aratrum et respiciens retro regno caelorum aptus esse non potest*" (Lawson, CCL 113 (1989), 95–96); Ildephonsus of Toledo, *De cognitione baptismi* 27 (after a description of the exorcism at 26): "*Ti in nonnullis locis, ut refertur, sales accipiunt, velut significato sapientiae condimento. Sed licet forsitan, ut dicitur, quia sola hoc antiquitas commendavit, adeo usquequaqum non improbat. Quia vero, ut catechuminis in adipiscendo fidei sacramento tradantur, evidenti sanctae Scripturae nullo documento monstratur, ideo nihil officit ubi non fit*" (Yarza Urquiola, CCL 114A (2007), 368; see 277–342 for a study of this treatise).

62 For more details see Latham (1982) who provides an overview of the symbolism of salt in Judaism, set in the context of contemporary ancient practices and in Roman liturgical sources, then discusses the rite in Christian initiation, the symbolism of salt in Western and Eastern Fathers and finally Jesus' saying; Tarot, C., (1988), 'De l'antiquité au monde moderne: le sel du baptême: avatars d'un rite, complexité d'un symbole', *Journal d'agriculture traditionnelle et de botanique appliquée* (Paris Muséum national d'histoire naturelle), 35, 281–302 who focuses on Greek, Roman and Jewish uses and understandings of salt, and on the rite of giving salt in Christian initiation across the middle ages.

63 Later, indeed, Bede refers to the rite relating it to key biblical passages, see *In Ezram et Neemiam* 11, 9: "*Nam et dominus per legem in omni sacrificio sal offerri praecipit et in evangelio dicit, habete in vobis sal et pacem habete inter vos, nec tamen frustra David in valle*

a symbol of discipleship. In this sense, it appears to have the function of creating a bond, showing to the new catechumens that they are now members of the community.<sup>64</sup> The preservative and protective qualities of salt, and the connection of the Latin etymology of wisdom to taste—*sapio* “to have taste, to be wise” and *sapientia* “good taste, intelligence, wisdom”—may further explain that the rite spread in the West, associating it to exorcism and the bestowing of God's wisdom—as clear from the Roman and Spanish sources quoted above. Since the exorcism may also have been part of the admission ritual in Augustine's community—as we will see further on—it is possible that salt also had this function in late antique Africa. Nevertheless, in the quoted passage and in the *Confessiones*, Augustine does not give any clues about how concretely the rite was performed and only tells us that a blessing and an explanation about the special nature of salt—not to be regarded as everyday salt—needed to be provided by the catechist, without detailing what function the rite had, beyond the fact that, by giving taste, it symbolised the teaching of hidden meaning, and served as a rite of incorporation.

Augustine's interpretations of Jesus' saying may provide further clues to understand how he might have interpreted the rite. It appears that Augustine, who rarely resorted to Jesus' saying, only quoted Mt 5,13 and its reference to disciples as salt contrasted with tasteless salt, mainly in an anti-Donatist context to create a sense of belonging: only Catholic members of the community, who keep unity, can claim to have the salt mentioned by Jesus and be saved. Donatists, however, are outside the Church and therefore tasteless, condemned by imperial laws and to be damned.<sup>65</sup> Augustine's use of Mt 5, 13 followed in the

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*salinarum idumeos percussisse legitur quia nimirum sal caelestis sapientiae quo initiantur catechumini in cunctis operum nostrorum sacrificiis offerre iubemur* (Hurst, CCL 119A (1969), 317).

64 It is perhaps in this sense, as a symbol of covenant, that the rite might have a connection to Jewish practices. On this theme see for instance Oort, J. van, (1999), ‘Jewish Elements in the Origin of North African Christianity’, in Mgaloblishvili, T., (ed.), (1999), *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus* (Richmond, Surrey), 97–105.

65 In *Bapt. VI*, 14,23 Augustine quotes and refutes the polemical use of Mt 5,13 in the *Sententiae episcoporum* 7 (Diercks, CCL 3E, 23) where it serves to promote the need of rebaptism for heretics. Augustine's work was written in the middle of anti-Donatist polemics around 404–405, see Schindler, A., (1990), ‘Baptismo (De –)’, *AL* 1, fasc. 4, 574–582; Hombert (2000), 93–94. Then see Augustine, *In ps. 59*, 2: “Vos estis sal terrae; et si sal infatuatum fuerit, ad nihilum valebit aliud, nisi ut foras prociatur (Mt 5, 13)? Bonum est ergo sapienter humilari. Ecce nunc nonne humilantur haeretici? Nonne leges contra illos datae sunt etiam ab hominibus, contra quos divinae regnant, quae illos ante etiam condemnauerant? Ecce humilantur, ecce fugantur, ecce persecutionem patiuntur, sed sine sapore, profatuitate, pro vanitate” (Dekkers-Fraipont, CCL 39 (1956), 756; the heretics are clearly the Donatists; the sermon may be dated around 412–413 or 416–417, see Pignot, M., *In ps. 59*, BA 60A forthcoming);

footsteps of other early Christian writers who also understood Jesus' *logion* as a reference to individuals abandoning the Christian faith and heretics.<sup>66</sup> The other, less frequent use, found in a few early writings of Augustine, is to understand the worthless salt of Mt 5, 13 as a reference to individuals who wrongly put their hopes in this world and thus have lost their strength and saltiness.<sup>67</sup> The story of Lot's wife, who, while leaving Sodom, looked back and was changed into a pillar of salt (Gn 19, 26; Lk 17, 32) is similarly exploited by Augustine—again in the footsteps of other early Christian writers—as an example giving a taste of wisdom to the audience—playing on the etymology of *sapientia*—and exhorting them to keep hope and not to look back at their past life when enduring suffering.<sup>68</sup> All this further suggests that the giving of salt at the admission of catechumens, which likely predated Augustine's episcopacy, may have been connected to Jesus' saying and meant to highlight the new membership of converts, who now started to be his disciples, enjoyed a taste of the hope of eternal life, and were required to live up to this new commitment.

Beyond the giving of salt, it should be emphasised that the *sacramentum* received by candidates at admission according to the *De catechizandis rudibus*

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*In ps. 101, 11, 9: "Unde vobis cor dolet? Quia et imperatores contra haereticos leges proponunt, ibi impletum est: et regna ut serviant domino (Ps 101, 23). [...] Non sapitis, et foris estis; sal infatuatum estis, ideo et a hominibus conculcamini (cf. Mt 5, 13)" (Gori-Pierantoni, CSEL 95/1 (2011), 56–57; perhaps to be dated between 403 and 408 see Hombert (2000), 631–632); In ps. 106, 14: "Manifestum est, fratres, omnes qui se dividunt ab unitate, pauci fiunt. Multi enim sunt, sed in unitate, dum non separantur ab unitate; cum enim coeperit ad eos non pertinere multitudo unitatis, in haeresi et in schismate pauci sunt. [...] Reprobati enim sunt ab ecclesia dei: et magis, quia principes esse voluerunt, ideo contemti sunt, et facti sunt sal infatuatum proiectum foras; ideo conculcatur ab hominibus (cf. Mt 5, 13)" (Gori-Pierantoni, CSEL 95/1 (2011), 280–281; again these heretics have to be the Donatists; the sermon is uncertainly dated).*

66 Besides the *Sententiae episcoporum*, see Optatus of Milevis, *Contra donatistas* VII, 5,5–6 and Chromatius of Aquileia, *Tractatus in Matthaeum* 18, 4 (both quoted by Requin, N., (2019), *Les Quaestiones euangeliorum d'Augustin d'Hippone. 100 commentaires sur les Évangiles de Matthieu et de Luc* (Canterano), 478).

67 Augustine, *S. dom. m. 1*, 16 (written in 394), interprets the verse as an exhortation not to put one's hopes in temporal goods but to persevere despite hardship, while in *Ep. 25, 1* (written in 395), Augustine speaks positively of those who do not lose their saltiness although living in this world. To these references one may add discussions of the story of Lot.

68 See Augustine, *Ciu. x*, 8 and XVI, 30; *C. Faust. XXII*, 41; *In ps. 69*, 9; 75, 16; 83, 3; *Qu. eu. II*, 43; *S. 105*, 5,7. In *F. et op. 25*, 47 the behaviour of candidates who are baptised without a change in their way of life is equated to the behaviour of Lot's wife. For further references and discussion on the interpretation of Lot's wife in Augustine and the wider context of early Christianity see Munier, Ch., (1989), 'La femme de Lot dans la littérature juive et chrétienne des premiers siècles', *Cahiers de Biblia Patristica* 2, 123–142; Dulaey, M., (1997), 'Le salut de Lot. Gen 19 dans l'Église ancienne', *AnnSE* 14/2, 327–353; Requin (2019), 526–527.

may have encompassed a larger set of rites. The English translation quoted for the *De catechizandis rudibus*, giving “sacrament of salt”, has been amended here because it translates the conjecture “*de sacramento salis*”, based on the mention of salt in the *Confessiones*, which has found its way in most of the secondary literature, although the Latin text adopted in all editions, following the unanimous reading of manuscripts, states “*de sacramento sane*”.<sup>69</sup> This detail shows the extent to which scholars have attempted to harmonise the evidence to suggest the performance of a so-called “sacrament of salt”. Using these two famous texts and others, scholars of liturgy have attempted to reconstruct a precise sequence of rites taking place at the admission into the catechumenate, at times debating in which specific order they were performed.<sup>70</sup>

A more detailed exploration of this evidence, however, suggests that in the case of the rites of the catechumenate, Augustine makes a broader use of the word *sacramentum*—thus here better translated as “rite”—to refer to the performance of a set of rites through which the candidates demonstrated their commitment—among which the giving of salt and the signing with the cross. Augustine's texts should not be overtly harmonised: while there is not enough evidence to reconstruct a specific ritual sequence at the admission, some references indicate that catechumens may have performed rites not merely at the admission but more regularly during their time as catechumens. Moreover, while studies on the catechumenate have not dwelled on this aspect, it is essential to underline that all references besides the *De catechizandis rudibus*, the *Confessiones* and a few sermons, are found in a context of open polemics, almost exclusively against Donatists in the early 400s, with the exception of one early treatise against Pelagians.<sup>71</sup>

69 The reading “*sacramento salis*” is mentioned in *PL* 40 (1841), 345, n. 1. Besides Christopher (ACW 2 (1946), 146 n. 315) the conjecture is adopted by Stenzel (1958), 171; van der Meer (1961), 354–356; Mandouze (1968), 84 n. 3; de Latte (1975), 188 n. 52; van Oort (1991), 186 n. 114; Vopřada (2020), 108–109. See however, Latham (1982), 99 and Madec, *BA* 11/1 (1991), 265–267 who keep the original text but conclude that the *sacramentum* refers to salt. Harmless (2014), 174 n. 157 underlines the lack of clarity of this reference to some *sacramentum*.

70 Roetzer (1930), 139–143; Busch (1938), 412–423; Monachino (1947), 167; Dölger, F.J., (1961), ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens IV’, *Antike und Christentum* 4, 5–17 at 12–13; van der Meer (1961), 354–356; de Latte (1975), 182–188; Righetti (1988), IV, 62–67; Grossi (1993), 20; Ferguson (2009), 779.

71 On the significance of baptism in these controversies see for instance Grossi, V., (1990), ‘Baptismus’, *AL* 1, fasc. 4, 583–591 and Bonner, G., (1990), ‘Baptismus parvulorum’, *ibid.*, 591–602; Ferguson (2009), 795–816.

### 1.2.2 Other Rites and Polemics against the Donatists

Although the *De catechizandis rudibus* does not mention it clearly, Augustine's polemical references to the process of admission show that the first catechesis and the associated rites gave to newcomers the new status of *catechumeni* in the Christian community. A passage of the third book of the *Contra Litteras Petilianus* contains little-noticed evidence about this process, almost contemporary to the *De catechizandis rudibus*.<sup>72</sup> In a complex passage debating 1 Cor 3, 6 (*"Ego plantavi, Apollo rigavit; sed Deus incrementum dedit"*), Augustine quotes Petilianus' interpretation stating that the verse means "I made (*feci*) the man a catechumen (*catechumenum*) in Christ, Apollo baptised, God confirmed what we did"<sup>73</sup> and comments that Petilianus should have added the end of the Pauline quotation about the fact that it is God who gives the increase.<sup>74</sup> Petilianus' expression "*catechumenum facere*" corresponds to the action of planting, while baptising corresponds to watering. Augustine then specifies that in this context the role of the minister is only to administer the word and the *sacramentum*.<sup>75</sup> The same verse was already debated in Optatus of Milevis' work against Donatists in very similar terms, interpreting the quotation as a reference to the planting of a catechumen and baptism, again to stress, however, that it is not the administrator but God who makes him grow.<sup>76</sup> Here, in a renewed debate over the role played by the administrator in baptism, Augustine, like Optatus, extends the controversy over rebaptism to include the admission into the catechumenate.

Thus, the action of "making a catechumen" mentioned by Optatus, Petilianus and Augustine was equivalent to the ritual admission and commitment described in the *De catechizandis rudibus* as a *sacramentum*. Augustine's lengthy discussion of 1 Cor 3, 6 further shows this correspondence: after denying the interpretation of Petilianus, Augustine matches "making a catechumen"

<sup>72</sup> On *C. litt. Pet.* see Chapter 1 note 98.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 53.65: "*Ego hominem in Christo catechumenum feci, Apollo baptizavit, deus quod fecimus confirmavit*" (Petschenig, *CSEL* 52 (1909), 219; my translation).

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 53.65.

<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 54.66: "*Ad ministrandum et dispensandum verbum ac sacramentum aliquid est, ad mundandum autem et iustificandum non est aliquid*" (Petschenig, *CSEL* 52 (1909), 220).

<sup>76</sup> Optatus of Milevis, *Contra Donatistas* v, 7.8: "*Ego quidem plantavi—hoc est: de pagano catechumenum feci—Apollo rigavit—hoc est: ille catechumenum baptizavit—sed ut cresceret quod plantatum aut irrigatum est, Deus fecit (1 Cor 3, 6)*" (Labrousse, *SC* 413 (1996), 146). The same passage is also commented by Augustine in *C. ep. Parm.* II, 14.32, without any allusion to the catechumenate.



with evangelisation, thus the teaching of the word to newcomers.<sup>77</sup> He adds that evangelisation requires particular skill, while baptism can be performed by even the least instructed.<sup>78</sup> The same image of planting is used in the model catechesis of the *De catechizandis rudibus* to describe the first catechesis to the newcomer, while in a later letter Augustine points to Ambrose as the one who “planted” him, and thus initiated him through the catechumenate.<sup>79</sup>

Other anti-Donatist polemics of Augustine from the 390s to the early 410s offer complementary evidence of rites for catechumens, which may have been part of the admission process. Optatus had already accused Donatists—according to a neglected manuscript variant—of “making catechumens” out of newly baptised Catholics, thus forcing them to start the catechumenate again.<sup>80</sup> In his footsteps, Augustine frequently accuses Donatists of denying the Christian background of converts adhering to their Church. Like Optatus, the bishop of Hippo frequently mentions that Donatists ask converts to state “that they are pagan”, thus requiring them to become Christian and undergo the full process of the catechumenate.<sup>81</sup> This common theme of Augustine's anti-Donatist polemic is more closely connected to the practice of admission into the catechumenate in the small anti-Donatist treatise against Petilianus

77 Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* 111, 55.67–56.68. See as well *F. et op.* 12, 18 where Augustine mentions the same action of “making a catechumen” to refer to the conversion of a pagan priest.

78 Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* 111, 56.68: “*Verumtamen perfecte baptizare etiam minus docti possunt, perfecte autem evangelizare multo difficilioris et rarioris est operis*” (Petschenig, *CSEL* 52 (1909), 222).

79 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 21, 37: “*Nam et ecce te modo per istum sermonem aedificamus atque plantamus*” followed by a quotation of 1Cor 3, 9 (Bauer, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 162); Augustine, *Ep.* 147, 23.52. S. 302 (= 302 + Guelf. 25), 3 also connects the action of “making a Christian” to the sign of the cross put on the forehead.

80 Optatus, *Contra Donatistas* 11, 24.3: “*Invenistis fideles novos fecistis cathecuminos agnoscite vos animas evertisse*” (this variant is found in the oldest manuscript of Optatus' work, St Petersburg, *National Library of Russia*, lat. 25, Q.v.1.2 (5th–6th c.) and in the related manuscript Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, lat. 13335 (15th c.), as noted in the apparatus of Ziwsa, *CSEL* 26 (1893), 61 and Labrousse, *SC* 412 (1995), 292–293). There seem to be no good reason to follow the editors in rejecting this passage as unauthentic. See as well Optatus, *Contra Donatistas* 111, 11.5–6 and v, 3.10–12 (Donatists say “be Christian” to baptised converts as if they were pagans).

81 Augustine, *Ep.* 35, 3: “*Persuadetur eis, ut ad lavacrum alterum veniant atque, ut id accipere mereantur, paganos se esse respondeant*” (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 34 (1898), 29; from spring 396, see Perler, O., Maier, J.-L., (1969), *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris), 213 and 439; Divjak (2001), 952 and 1027). Other examples: *Bapt.* 11, 7.10 (written around 404–405 see note 65); *In Ps.* 32, 11, 2, 29 (autumn–winter 403; Hombert (2000), 13 n. 40 and Dulaey, *BA* 58B (2014), 31–36); *In Ps.* 39, 1 and 26 (in 407: see Dulaey, *BA* 59A (2017), 195–201); *Jo. eu. tr.* 5, 13 (perhaps winter 406–407 see Chapter 4 note 26 and my discussion of La Bonnardière's hypothesis in the same chapter at pp. 183–187), etc. I thank Martine Dulaey for alerting me to this common theme.

*De Unico baptismo*, probably written around 410–411, where Augustine deplors that Donatists rally baptised Catholics to their side, not only laymen but even clerics, priests and bishops, and “make them catechumens”.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, reacting against such practices in the *Contra Cresconium* between 405 and 407,<sup>83</sup> Augustine provides particularly rare references to rites for catechumens:

[...] already baptised among us, they tell him that he has never begun to be a Christian (*christianum*), when they blow on him (*exsufflant*) as a pagan, when they make him a catechumen (*catechumenum*) to prepare him to be dipped again (*retinguendum*), or I should say to be drowned (*extinguendum*). [...] Why does one blow on (*exsufflatur*) what is the same? Why does one repeat what is not different?<sup>84</sup>

This passage relates to the broader demonstration, again in the footsteps of Optatus, that Donatists share the same religion (*religio*) and the same rites (*sacramenta*) as an argument against rebaptism.<sup>85</sup> While we know very little about Donatist practices, it is entirely plausible, despite the use of this argument in a polemical context, that the rites for catechumens mentioned here were familiar both to Augustine and to the Donatists—as already hinted, for instance, by Petilianus’ interpretation of Paul’s quotation discussed above. Beyond this

82 Augustine, *Un. bapt.* 11.19: “*Quin etiam non solum laicos, sed et clericos nec quoslibet clericos, verum et presbyteros et episcopos, etsi in illis ecclesiis baptizati sunt, quas ipsi apostoli labore proprio fundaverunt, si aliquo modo seductos ad se transferre potuerint, catechumenos faciunt*” (Petschenig, *CSEL* 53 (1910), 20). On this work see De Veer, A.C., *BA* 31 (1968), 647–661 and 830–853; Tilley, M.A., (1999), ‘Unico baptismo contra Petilianum, De’, in Fitzgerald (1999a), 858–859. In *Collatio Carthaginensis* 1, 197, a Donatist bishop is denounced by Catholics as having returned to the status of catechumen when entering the Donatist community.

83 See Chapter 1 note 96.

84 Augustine, *Cresc.* 11, 5.7: “[...] *apud nos iam baptizatum nec coepisse dicunt esse christianum, cum tamquam paganum exsufflant, cum catechumenum faciunt, ut praeparent deinde retinguendum vel potius extinguendum* [...]”. *Cur quod idem est exsufflatur, cur quod non diversum est iteratur?*” (Petschenig, *CSEL* 52 (1909), 365–367; my translation).

85 Augustine, *Cresc.* 11, 4.6–5.7 (see as well IV, 11.13 and IV, 30.37 mentioning the *exsufflatio* and baptism). On shared practice see Optatus, *Contra Donatistas* III, 9.4; IV, 2.4; V, 1.11 and, in Augustine *In Ps.* 103, I, 9; S. 268, 2; S. *Caes. eccl.* 5–6 (for further references and discussion see also Borgomeo, P., (1972), *L’Église de ce temps dans la prédication de saint Augustin* (Paris), 249; Perrin, M.-Y., (2017), *Civitas confusionis. Recherches sur la participation des fidèles aux controverses doctrinales dans l’antiquité tardive* (Paris-Beijing-New York), 118–120). The Donatists’ practice here denounced was perhaps understood as an attempt to circumvent the laws against rebaptism by considering candidates as pagans (*Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 6.1–6).

passage of the *Contra Cresconius*, Augustine frequently refers to *exsufflare* as the action performed by Donatists against "Christ" or "the baptism of Christ".<sup>86</sup> The *exsufflatio* was a rite meant to expel the Devil from candidates but also from pagan shrines, apparently related here to the action of "making catechumens", thus to the first rites given to the newcomer.<sup>87</sup> Later, this argument against rebaptism, extended to include references to the repetition of rites of the catechumenate, particularly the *exsufflatio*, was used against Arians in Vandal Africa.<sup>88</sup> All this shows the significance of the catechumenate in controversies and the fight over members: rebaptising opponents meant to start the whole process of conversion, teaching and ritual incorporation.

### 1.2.3 The Significance of Admission Rites

It is restrictive, however, to consider that catechumens only received the rites mentioned in these polemical disputes at the admission into the catechumenate. While Augustine remains vague about the circumstances in which rites were performed, their significance may also have been due to their repetitive character, as other evidence suggests. First, in a passage of the second book of the *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione*—the first refutation of Pelagian ideas written on the instigation of Marcellinus at the end of 411 after the condemnation in Carthage of Pelagius' disciple Celestius—Augustine discusses the possibility of a sinless life and aims at showing that no man on earth is

86 Augustine, *Ep. Io. tr.* 2, 3; *Ep.* 52, 3; *Ep.* 105, 2.7; *Ep.* 108, 3; *Ep.* 145, 16; *In. Ps.* 145, 16; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 13–14 ("Christum exsufflare"); *Bapt.* IV, 15.22; VI, 20.34; *Ep.* 43, 8.24; *C. ep. Parm.* II, 19. 38; III, 4. 21–22; III, 6.29; S. 198aug (= Dolbeau 26), 45; S. 218B (= Guelf. 2), 2; ("the baptism of Christ"); *Ep.* 185, 2.8; *C. litt. Pet.* II, 81.180; II, 92.212 ("the sacraments of Christ"). See also: *Ep.* 23, 4; *C. litt. Pet.* I, 12.13; 17. 18; II, 77.172; 92.211; *Cresc.* II, 4.5–5.7; 10.12; IV, 30. 37; *Un. bapt.* 7.11.

87 See the detailed study of Van Slyke, D., (2004), 'Augustine and catechumenal "exsufflatio": an integral element of Christian initiation', *EphLit* 118, 175–208. More broadly on exorcism, besides studies quoted in note 2 see Dölger (1909), 118–130; Thraede, K., (1969), 'Exorzismus', *RAC* 7 (1969), 44–117, at 89–91; Lukken, G.M., (1973), *Original Sin in the Roman Liturgy. Research into the Theology of Original Sin in the Roman Sacramentaria and the Early Baptismal Liturgy* (Leiden, 1973), esp. 226–229; Klöckener, M., (2003), 'Exorzismus', *AL* 2, fasc. 7/8, 1188–1193.

88 See (Quodvultdeus), *Adversus quinque haereses* VII.42 (in small capitals); *Contra Iudaeos* XIX.6; *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 2, XII.6; *De symbolo* 1, XIII.6; *De symbolo* 3, XIII.5; *De ultima quarta feria* VI.24; Quodvultdeus, *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei*, *Dimidium temporis* VIII; Pseudo-Victor of Vita, *Passio septem monachorum* 3, 8; Fulgentius, *Psalmus abecedarius* 67–73 and perhaps 223 referring to unsalted Arians to hint at their inefficient catechumenate; Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II, 3. I owe some of these references to the informative study of Whelan, R., (2014), 'African Controversy: The Inheritance of the Donatist Schism in Vandal Africa', *JEH* 65/3, 504–521, at 516, n. 59–61.

sinless, as even those staying free from personal sin carry the original sin transmitted through generations since Adam.<sup>89</sup> Augustine states the necessity of infant baptism, and comes to the debated quote from 1 Cor 7, 14 (*"Sanctificatur enim vir infidelis in uxore et sanctificatur mulier infidelis in fratre; alioquin filii vestri immundi essent, nunc autem sancti sunt"*).<sup>90</sup> To show that the sanctification mentioned is not to be confused with that of baptism and not to be used as a proof of the *impeccantia* of children born to Christian parents, Augustine stresses that catechumens have their own rites:

Sanctification is not all of one sort. I think, in fact, that even the catechumens (*catechumenos*) are sanctified in their own way by the sign of Christ (*signum Christi*) and prayer along with the imposition of hands (*orationem manus inpositionis*). And though what they receive is not the body of Christ, it is nonetheless, holy and more holy than the foods by which we are nourished, because it is a sacrament (*sacramentum*).<sup>91</sup>

This text is a turning point in Augustine's use of the liturgy of initiation as an argument, applied here for the first time against Pelagians. Augustine describes rites given to catechumens which include a marking, a prayer with a laying on of hands, and the giving of some food which is referred to as a *sacramentum*. One might compare this allusion to food to the giving of salt, and similarly, the mention of a sign of Christ and a prayer, with the blessing and the marking of the forehead of candidates. Indeed, scholars have tended to relate this passage to the other evidence in Augustine of rites performed by catechumens to conclude that the *sacramentum* here refers to the reception of salt. Debates have particularly focused on whether this food was simply salt or exorcised bread, as a substitute to the Eucharist—nothing in the evidence supports this latter hypothesis.<sup>92</sup> Although similarities are striking, there is no reason to

89 See Delaroche, *BA* 20A (2013), 7–57 and 419–559. For related events see for instance Lancel (1999b), 457–489.

90 Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* 11, 26.42.

91 Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* 11, 26.42: *"Non unius modi est sanctificatio. Nam et catechumenos secundum quendam modum suum per signum Christi et orationem manus inpositionis puto sanctificari et, quod accipiunt quamvis non sit corpus Christi, sanctum est tamen et sanctius quam cibi quibus alimur, quoniam sacramentum est"* (Zycha, *CSEL* 60 (1913), 113; Teske, *WSA* 1/23 (1997), 107–108).

92 Bingham (1840), 290–293 (with several references to earlier studies); Mayer (1868), 61–65; Wiegand (1899), 9–10; Dölger (1909), 88–89; Busch (1938), 419–423; Stenzel (1958), 171–175; Dölger (1961), 13, n. 48; van der Meer (1961), 354–356; Botte (1963), 322–330; de Latte (1975), 188; Latham (1982), 99–103; Pieri, B., (1998), *Aurelii Augustini Sermo CCCII* (Bologna), 136.

restrict the performance of these rites to the admission into the catechumenate since Augustine presents these actions as pertaining to catechumens in general.

The existence of special rites for catechumens is also generically mentioned in another polemical treatise, the *De baptismo contra Donatistas*, written around 404–405, refuting the Donatists' practice of rebaptism and more broadly their ecclesiology, with a focus on the history of the schism and Cyprian's problematic position on baptism.<sup>93</sup> Augustine speaks of the *sacramentum* of baptism and of the *sacramentum* of catechumens, explaining that he is not diminishing the significance of baptism in favour of the catechumens' rites when he states that a good Catholic catechumen is better than a bad baptised Catholic.<sup>94</sup> Augustine reacts against a view which he attributes to the Donatists: Church membership and the rite of baptism, only when performed by a worthy administrator, would be the core requirements to become a Christian, while it is always better to be baptised rather than a catechumen. Augustine instead argues that baptism is valid independently from the administrator, unique and unrepeatable, and that although initiation rites and belonging are important, they are not enough without true conversion and faith.<sup>95</sup> Thus, by nuancing his opponents' insistence on baptism, Augustine indirectly provides rare information on the fact that catechumens performed specific rites. A number of sermons of Augustine also imply that *catechumeni* received special attention in terms of rituals, particularly because of their disputed status in polemics. They point, without further details, to a special *sacramentum* of catechumens, through which they are conceived in the womb of the Church but not yet born.<sup>96</sup> The rites performed by catechumens thus demon-

93 On the dating see note 65.

94 Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 21.28: "*Sed etiam in ipsa intus catholica bonum catechumenum malo baptizato anteposimus, nec ideo tamen sacramento baptismatis [...] facimus iniuriam, aut catechumeni sacramentum sacramento baptismi praeferendum putamus, cum aliquem catechumenum aliquo baptizato fidiorem melioremque cognoscimus*" (Petschenig, *CSEL* 51 (1908), 255).

95 Ibid.

96 Augustine, *S.* 260C (= Mai 94), 1: "*Itaque illa quae adiuvante domino sumus ad eos locuturi, quorum octavus baptismi dies hodiernus peragitur, eo libentius amplectimini, quo exultatis eos vobis novella germanitate coniungi; simul ut etiam catechumeni, quos iam nonnullo sacramento mater concepit ecclesia, desiderio novae lucis urgeant eius viscera, et perfici nascique festinent*" (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 334); see as well *In Ps.* 57, 5; *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2; *S.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 3. For Augustine, while catechumens are conceived, only the baptised are born and become sons of God (*S.* 56, 4.5 and *C. Iul.* VI, 16.49). For this imagery see notably Chapter 3, p. 155.

strated their commitment and were markers of a peculiar kind of membership. To some extent, they were the counterpart of the rites of the faithful, although the interpretation of the giving of salt as a surrogate for the Eucharist is difficult to demonstrate.

### 1.3 *The Catechumenate for Children and the Pelagian Controversy*

With the development of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine transferred and refined the argumentative techniques based on the performance of rites of the catechumenate employed against the Donatists, this time to demonstrate the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>97</sup> This polemic provides fresh and precious evidence about practices of the catechumenate and the initiation of children. The *Confessiones* already imply that children too could receive the rites of admission into the catechumenate. This is not evoked in the *De catechizandis rudibus*, perhaps because Deogratias' question about catechesis primarily implied an audience of individuals able to understand the instruction. All other references to the catechumenate for children are found in polemical writings in the context of the Pelagian controversy, starting with the already mentioned treatise *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* in 411–412, but with more emphasis and most frequently from 418 onwards, as the bishop repeatedly resorts to the rites of exorcism and exsufflation (*exsufflatio*) performed on infants as proof of the need for cleansing original sin in baptism.<sup>98</sup>

97 For detailed explorations of the liturgical argument used by Augustine in the controversy over infant baptism, see particularly Vinel, A., (1986), *Le rôle de la liturgie dans la réflexion doctrinale de saint Augustin contre les pélagiens* (Université Catholique de Louvain PhD. Thesis); Vinel, A., (1987), 'L'argument liturgique opposé par saint Augustin aux Pélagiens', *QL* 68, 209–241; Van Slyke, D., (2004), 'Augustine and Catechumenal "exsufflatio": an Integral Element of Christian Initiation', *EphLit* 118, 175–208, at 197–207; Dupont, A., (2012), *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones ad Populum During the Pelagian Controversy* (Leiden), 297–441 (on the use of prayer).

98 Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* 1, 34.63: "*Quid de ipsa forma sacramenti loquar? Vellem aliquis istorum, qui contraria sapiunt, mihi baptizandum parvulum afferret. Quid in illo agit exorcismus meus, si in familia diaboli non tenetur?*" (Urba-Zycha, *CSEL* 60 (1913), 63–64). The argument is thus already made but without mention of exsufflations. The combined mention of exorcism and exsufflation is first found in Augustine, *Gr. et pecc. or.* 11, 40.45, then in several other instances during the controversy. Augustine uses the same phrases to designate pre-baptismal exorcisms and exsufflations performed on little children, often with reference to Colossians 1, 13 (see *Ep.* 194, 10.46; *Nupt. et conc.* 11, 26, 50; *Symb. cat.* 1, 2, and particularly *C. Iul.* 1, 4.14, 5.19; III, 3.8, 3.9; III, 5.11; VI, 5.11; *C. Iul. imp.* 1, 50, 117; II, 120, 181; III, 82, 182; IV, 7, 77, 120; VI, 23). On exorcism alone and more generic references: Augustine, *C. Iul.* III, 9.18; *C. Iul. imp.* 1, 56–57, 60; II, 135, 173, 224; III, 14, 52, 146, 164, 199, 208; IV, 108; V, 9. See a discussion of this in Lukken (1973), 198–200; Ribreau, *BA* 25A, note complémentaire 'Rites du souffle et exorcisme' (forthcoming).

Although Augustine's objective was to promote the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the emphasis on practices suggests that he based his argument on widely accepted rites rather than being himself, through his theological views, a promoter of a marginal custom.

Thus, Augustine's references to rites in polemics over infant baptism show that there was no restriction of age for entering the catechumenate.<sup>99</sup> Augustine applies the same division between catechumens and faithful Christians to infants, suggesting that they were similarly initiated by first becoming catechumens, as it was the case for himself as a boy.<sup>100</sup> He makes clear that infants and children follow the same rites as adults, with relevant adaptations for infants unable to speak, notably with the help of godparents. The rites of exorcism and exsufflation meant to purify candidates are evoked in a generic way or sometimes related to the baptismal preparation, while other texts concentrate on the profession of faith and renunciation that were part of this final process.<sup>101</sup> Augustine mentions the possibility for children to recite the creed on their own,<sup>102</sup> while the *De symbolo ad catechumenos*, preached on the creed during the baptismal preparation, refers to the rituals of exorcism performed on infants.<sup>103</sup> Thus, it seems that children of any age could routinely

99 Generic references in sermons to candidates of all ages, may already hint at this aspect despite their stereotyped character (see Augustine, *S.* 49, 2 mentioning *pueri, adulescentuli, iuvenes, graviores, decrepiti* in connection to the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Mt 20, 1–16).

100 Augustine, *S.* 294, 13.14: "*Ubi ponis parvulos baptizatos? Profecto in numero credentium. Nam ideo et consuetudine Ecclesiae antiqua, canonica, fundatissima, parvuli baptizati fideles vocantur. Et sic de his quaerimus: Iste infans christianus est? Respondetur: Christianus. Catechumenus, an fidelis? Fidelis; utique a fide, fides a credendo*" (*PL* 38 (1841), 1343; probably preached on 27/6/413 in Carthage, see Verbraken (1976), 131; Hombert (2000), 385–386). Augustine, *S.* 324 tells of the emergency baptism of a "*catechumenus infans*" (*ibid.* 1447; probably 426 see Verbraken (1976), 140). The baptism of Augustine's son Adeodatus also offers evidence of the converts' practice of baptising together with their own children (Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14).

101 See Augustine, *Ep.* 98, 5–10; *Ep.* 194, 10.46; *Ep.* 5\*, 1; *Gr. et pecc. or.* II, 40.45; *Lib. arb.* III, 23.67; *Pecc. mer.* I, 33.62 and 34.63; see as well references in note 98.

102 Augustine, *An. et or.* I, 10.12 and III, 9.12 (about Dinocrates reciting the creed at the age of seven; this work was completed in 420). On the other hand, he notes that infants are unable to know the creed (*Gest. Pel.* 2, 4, written in 417).

103 Augustine, *Symb. cat.* 1, 2: "*Ideo sicut vidistis hodie, sicut nostis, et parvuli exsufflantur et exorcizantur*" (Vander Plaetse, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 183). On this sermon, its uncertain dating after 415, and its attribution to Augustine despite doubts expressed by some scholars, see, with bibliography: Rodomonti (1995); Dolbeau, F., 'De symbolo ad catechumenos, (De –)', *AL* (forthcoming). Hill, *WSA* III/10 (1995), 455 n. 1 suggested 425 without convincing arguments (variations in the creed and references to Arians). It may be compared to the series of Augustine, *S.* 212–215.

enter the catechumenate and then prepare for baptism during Lent and be baptised at Easter, while baptism administered in emergency cases was probably most common.<sup>104</sup> Although most of the evidence for children focuses on pre-baptismal rites, it seems plausible that they also took part in the rites of admission into the catechumenate and other rites performed by catechumens more generally.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

The admission into the catechumenate was conceived as a progressive ritual integration into the community. The only source illustrating how the process of admission worked is the *De catechizandis rudibus*; however it does not precisely describe the actions performed, simply referring to a marking, a blessing, a reception of some *species*, calling the ceremony a *sacramentum*, without explaining the meaning of each action. A comparison with other passages shows that newcomers acquired the status of *catechumenus* during this first session and that it included, but not only, a giving of salt, and a sign of the cross on the candidate and perhaps an *exsufflatio*. I have also suggested that catechumens may have received rites of initiation regularly beyond the admission, as a way to take part actively in religious life and to confirm their commitment. Augustine most frequently mentioned such practices in the context of polemical controversies. This corroborates the studies of Vinel and Van Slyke, who have shown that Augustine's use of rites against Donatists and Pelagians was a common tool of polemics over the course of his life.<sup>105</sup> Augustine accused

<sup>104</sup> Infant mortality was high and parents or others were eager to baptise dying babies: Augustine often refers to this fact. He also mentions unbelievers who bring their infants to baptism, noting that often they die before receiving it (see Augustine, *Ep.* 217, 6.19; *Io. eu. tr.* 38, 6; *Lib. arb.* 111, 23.67; *Perseu.* 12.31). Strangers and nuns might bring infants to baptism, in cases of orphans or abandoned children (Augustine, *Ep.* 98, 6). Canons, notably the *Breviarium Hipponense* provide parallel evidence (see canon 5). For Augustine's discussion of infant baptism in general, the bibliography is abundant, see good summaries with bibliography in Latte, R. de, (1976), 'Saint Augustin et le baptême. Étude liturgico-historique du rituel baptismal des enfants chez saint Augustin', *QL* 57/1, 41–55; Harmless, W., (1997), 'Christ the Pediatrician: Infant Baptism and Christological Imagery in the Pelagian Controversy', *AugStud* 28, 7–34; Ferguson (2009), 803–816; Dupont, A., (2010), 'John 3,5 and the Topic of Infant Baptism in Augustine', *VetChr* 47, 41–62. On infant baptism more broadly, emphasising its progressive development as a normative practice, see Wright (2007).

<sup>105</sup> Vinel (1986); Van Slyke (2004); see as well above, note 97. In a recent article (Merdinger, J., (2015), 'In League with the Devil? Donatist and Catholic Perspectives on Pre-baptismal Exsufflation', in Dupont-Gaumer-Lamberigts (2015), *The Uniquely African Controversy: Studies on Donatist Christianity*, 153–177), Merdinger expands on Van Slyke's study—which



Donatists of illegitimately repeating the rites on baptised Catholics passing to their side. He claimed that Catholics practised the same rites of initiation as the Donatists to reject rebaptism and prevent the conversion of members of his community to the opponents' side. His objective when discussing the rites of initiation performed by catechumens was to reclaim such rites from the Donatist's sphere. Later, during the Pelagian controversy, in a similar manner, Augustine used the rites of the catechumens and in particular pre-baptismal rites performed on infants to demonstrate the necessity of infant baptism for the purification of original sin. These polemics provide indirect evidence about the wide range of candidates entering into the catechumenate, be they infants, children or adults. The emphasis on rites in polemics is further proof for the regular involvement of catechumens in Christian communities and the role that they played as a disputed group.

## 2 Being a *catechumenus*: The Main Practices of Christians in the Making

Preaching against Donatists in Carthage in the *Basilica Restituta*, probably in the aftermath of the council of August 403—thus close to the *De catechizandis rudibus*—, Augustine, quoted and commented on Gal 4, 19 in these terms:

*My little children, I am in travail with you over again, until Christ be formed in you* (Gal 4, 19). Wait then, let yourself be formed, do not arrogate to yourself a decision you are perhaps not competent to make: you are still carnal. You have been conceived, and by the very fact of receiving the name of Christ you have been sacramentally born within the bowels of your mother. [...] Little ones are born within the bowels of the Church, and it is desirable for them to emerge fully formed; they must not be aborted. Let your mother bring you to birth, do not force her to miscarry. If you are prepared to be patient until you are fully formed, until the truth you are taught is firmly set in you, your mother's womb must hold you close.

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detected that Augustine's accusations concentrated on the *exsufflatio* while his predecessor Optatus had accused Donatists of performing exorcism as well—to suggest that Donatists had widely divergent practices. However, the distinction between exorcism and *exsufflatio* is a subtle one not always easily detectable in the sources—the first designating words spoken, the second ritual gestures—both being part of the same process. Using Augustine to reconstruct the Donatist's practices perhaps gives too much credit to his accusations and would require further demonstration.

If you hammer impatiently on its walls your mother will thrust you out. That will be painful for her, but your loss will be greater than hers.<sup>106</sup>

This passage sharply illustrates that stakes were high for the integration of *catechumeni*, particularly in a context of competition with Donatists.<sup>107</sup> Catechumens who had received the name of Christ—perhaps a reference to the admission process—had to be progressively initiated and made firmly adherent to the Catholic party. Refusing to go through the whole process of the catechumenate, accepting the views of rival groups, or even maybe attending their congregations, could cause premature abortion, that is being torn apart from the community.

Scholars studying initiation in Augustine, because of the paucity of the evidence, generally neglected the activities of catechumens and concentrated on the admission process and the intensive few weeks of preparation before baptism. However, the significance of catechumens in the development of a sense of community belonging suggests that special attention was devoted to their ritual initiation during the whole catechumenate. Trying to describe practices of *catechumeni* beyond generic references to their *sacramentum* is a difficult but worthwhile task. Catechumens were not only exhorted to baptism in order to secure their commitment, as we will see in the next chapter, but, before this commitment was reached, specific ritual practices designed for them had an essential role to play in progressively building a sense of Christian membership. The most obvious and known involvement of *catechumeni* in Augustine's community was their presence as hearers in the audience of his sermons, as a clearly identifiable body distinct from the faithful (*fideles*), the penitents

106 Augustine, *In Ps.* 57, 5: "Quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis (Gal 4, 19). *Exspecta ergo formari, noli tibi tribuere iudicium quod forte non nosti: carnalis es adhuc. Conceptus es eo ipso quo accepisti nomen Christi sacramento quodam, natus es in visceribus matris. [...] Ergo nascuntur intra viscera ecclesiae quidam parvuli; et bonum est ut formati exeant, ne abortu labantur. Generet te mater, non abortiat. Si patiens fueris, usquequo formeris, usquequo in te certa sit doctrina veritatis, continere te debent materna viscera. Si autem impatientia tua concusseris latera matris, cum dolore quidem te excutit foras, sed magis tuo malo quam suo*" (Müller, *CSEL* 94/1 (2004), 273–274; Boulding, *WSA* III/17 (2001), 127 adapted). For the dating, see Müller, H., (2001), 'Enarrationes in Psalmos. A. Philologische Aspekte', *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 804–838, at 816 and 828. This sort of appeal to catechumens against being torn apart from the mother Church is also found in Augustine's calls to baptism see Chapter 3, pp. 144, 150, 154–155.

107 Indeed, the next thoughts of Augustine in the sermon (*In Ps.* 57, 6) are for the abortions caused by Donatists: this could be a reference to candidates leaving his Church to be prepared in the Donatist community.

(*paenitentes*) and candidates to baptism (*competentes*).<sup>108</sup> Harmless, without studying all of them in detail, has listed twenty-nine addresses to catechumens by the bishop.<sup>109</sup> Obviously, as Harmless noted, catechumens were often present without being mentioned. Attendance at regular Christian services and other gatherings therefore constitutes the clearest evidence of the catechumens' involvement in Christian communities. Beyond this, however, a passage of the *De fide et operibus*, in which Augustine employs the practices of the catechumenate to demonstrate the necessity of pre-baptismal discipline, contains potential evidence about special instruction for *catechumeni*:

What is all that time (*tempus*) for, when they hold the name and place of catechumens (*nomen et locum catechumenorum*), if it is not for them to hear what the faith (*fides*) and pattern of Christian life (*vita*) should be, so that, when they have proved themselves, they may then eat from the Lord's table and drink from his cup? This is because all *who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink judgment for themselves* (1 Cor 11, 29). This is done for all the time (*quod autem fit per omne tempus*) beneficially appointed by the Church, so that the grade of the catechumens (*catechumenorum gradus*) receives those who are gaining access (*accedentes*) to the name of Christ; this is done (*hoc fit*) much more earnestly and frequently during the days when they are called *competentes*, that is, when they have already given in their names for the reception of baptism.<sup>110</sup>

A parallel is drawn between the first stage of the catechumenate, a time (*tempus*) regulated by the Church for those who become Christians as *catechumeni*, and what happens next, more intensively, when candidates are called *competentes*: "*quod autem fit [...] hoc fit*". *Catechumeni* essentially prepare for the

108 Augustine, *S.* 392, 6: "*Quod dico fidelibus et competentibus et paenitentibus, audiant catechumeni*" (*PL* 39 (1841), 1710). On the initiation as an oral process bringing candidates from hearing to believing and adhering to the community, see Harrison, C., (2013), *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford), chapter 4.

109 Harmless (2014), 184 and 229–234 (charts 4 and 7).

110 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9: "*Quid autem aliud agit totum tempus, quo catechumenorum locum et nomen tenent, nisi ut audiant, quae fides et qualis vita debeat esse christiani, ut, cum se ipsos probaverint, tunc de mensa domini manducant et de calice bibant? Quoniam qui manducat et bibit indigne, iudicium sibi manducat et bibit* (1 Cor 11, 29). *Quod autem fit per omne tempus, quo in ecclesia salubriter constitutum est, ut ad nomen Christi accedentes catechumenorum gradus excipiat, hoc fit multo diligentius et instantius his diebus, quibus competentes vocantur, cum ad percipiendum baptismum sua nomina iam dederunt*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 45; Kearney, *WSA* 1/8 (2005), 232 and Liguori, *FOC* 27 (1955), 231 adapted).

reception of the Eucharist by hearing some teaching about faith and morals, and *competentes* also receive some, though much more intensive, instruction. This passage may be understood as a reference to ordinary preaching in the church, which would have been attended by *catechumeni* as well as *competentes*. Most scholars indeed generally state that catechumens did not receive special instruction.<sup>111</sup> However, Augustine may here well refer to some special training both for *catechumeni* and then more intensively for *competentes*, in which case this text would be the only clear attestation of teaching designed for *catechumeni* after the admission catechesis. At least, the passage throws new light on the significance, for Augustine, of the division between specific groups within his community, where individuals who have become catechumens are assigned a peculiar position. Catechumens have a specific name (*nomen*), place (*locus*), and grade (*gradus*). The latter particularly refers both to the bottom position in the Church hierarchy and to a specific status, while the use of special names (*catechumeni*, *competentes*) and the allusion to an exclusive *locus* where catechumens stand—either physically, hierarchically, or both—all make clear that a specific organisation existed, despite the lack of more extensive discussion.<sup>112</sup> Beyond these allusive references, it is thus worth exploring further how *catechumeni* were both ritually integrated and singled-out in the community.

### 2.1 *Practices of Inclusion: The Sign of the Cross*

As we have seen, the catechumens' adhesion to the first catechesis and the rites of admission manifested their inclusion into the community. Among these rites, it is the signing of the cross on the forehead which is most often mentioned and commented on by Augustine when he refers to catechumens as Christians. In the first catechesis, Augustine underlines the significance of the rite shared by all Christians.<sup>113</sup> For Augustine, the sign of the cross put

111 Von Zezschwitz (1863), 118; Busch (1938), 425; de Latte (1975), 181 and 190; Lynch (1986), 94–95; Harmless, W., (2004), 'The Voice and the Word: Augustine's Catechumenate in Light of the Dolbeau Sermons', *AugStud* 35/1, 17–42, at 24; Pasquato (2006), 926; Gavriluk (2007), 288; Rebillard (2012a), 66; Vopřada (2020), 112. Harmless (2014), 27 generally followed this assumption but at 182 left the door open to the hypothesis of some peculiar instruction, although not of the same kind as that of the *competentes*.

112 There is no evidence besides this passage in African sources about a specific *locus* for catechumens; however Augustine also speaks of *locus paenitentiae/paenitentium* (*Ep.* 153, 3–7; *S.* 232, 8). *Gradus* is employed in *Conf.* VI, 11.18 to recall Augustine's status as a catechumen in Milan and by Manichaeans for hearers. In *Praed. Sanct.* 14, 27, Augustine refers to *catechumeni* as a grade distinguished from the faithful and the penitents.

113 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 20, 34: "Cuius passionis et crucis signo in fronte hodie tamquam in poste signandus es, omnesque christiani signantur" (Bauer, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 149).

on their forehead is shared with the baptised and makes them belong to the Christian community, as he noted in a sermon preached on 10 August, perhaps in Carthage: "You're a Christian, you carry on your forehead the cross of Christ. [...] from this sign, from this stamp which Christians receive as well when they become catechumens, here is to be understood why we are Christians".<sup>114</sup> Because Augustine particularly insists on the inclusiveness of the rite, an exploration of his references to the rite in general helps to get a better sense of its significance. However, Augustine mostly discusses the related imagery and the theological interpretations of the gesture, dedicating less attention to the concrete practice. Therefore, after an overview of Augustine's references to the rite, I here concentrate on his descriptions of the practice, particularly focusing on the significance of the rite for the catechumens' involvement in the community.<sup>115</sup>

In the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine does not provide us with a detailed explanation of the practice for new catechumens but only states that the sign is made on candidates when they enter the catechumenate.<sup>116</sup> A more comprehensive study of all references to the rite in Augustine shows that it was practised both by catechumens and baptised Christians: there is no remarkable difference between references aimed at the broader audience including baptised Christians and addresses to catechumens specifically. The act of signing oneself with the cross, particularly during services, is clearly parallel to the rite of initiation and mentioned a number of times by Augustine.<sup>117</sup> Signing oneself with the cross mirrored the first performance of this rite at the admission into the catechumenate. In the same way as the Lord's Prayer and the creed, texts which were first taught to candidates and only then could be recited by them,<sup>118</sup> the rite of signing the forehead of catechumens at the admission enabled them to demonstrate their belonging to the community by signing themselves. Thus Augustine did not distinguish the performance of the rite by clerics during ini-

114 Augustine, *S.* 302, 3 (= 302 + Guelf. 25): "*Christianus es, in fronte portas crucem Christi. [...] ab isto signo, ab isto characterem quem accipit christianus etiam cum fit catechumenus, hinc intellegitur quare simus christiani*" (Lambot, *SPM* 1 (1950), 102; Hill, *WSA* 111/8 (1994), 302 adapted); the sermon perhaps dates from 411–412 see Pieri (1998), 32–35; Hombert (2000), 495–506. See as well *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2.

115 A study including a more detailed discussion of all interpretations of Augustine is provided in Pignot (2019).

116 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 20, 34 and 26, 50.

117 See for instance for the practice of signing oneself, generically: Augustine, *Ep. Io. tr.* 5, 7; *In Ps.* 91, 7; *S.* 110A (= Dolbeau 17), 4; 285, 2. On the forehead: Augustine, *Ep.* 158, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4; *Io. eu. tr.* 55, 1; *In Ps.* 50, 1; *S.* 32, 13.

118 See Chapter 4, 2.2, pp. 210–230.

tiation and the practice of signing oneself. What mattered for him was that the sign served as a powerful way of asserting one's religious belonging.

Augustine's descriptions of the rite, unfortunately, do not dwell on how it was performed. The cross (*crux, lignum*) is the "*signum crucis*", "*signum Christi*", or simply a sign (*signum*), the sign of the Passion, or of the blood of Christ, connected to the typological reading of Exodus 12, 22–23.<sup>119</sup> To refer to the cross, the bishop also employs rarer expressions such as "*signum gratiae*", "*sacramentum fidei*" (in connection to the initiation of catechumens), and "*character*"—which normally refers to baptism, notably in anti-Donatists polemics.<sup>120</sup> The sign is carried on the forehead (*portare, habere, gestare, gerere*), as a mark that was permanently part of the individual's identity and it belongs to, and is conferred by, Christ.<sup>121</sup> About the gesture, Augustine most frequently employs *signare/signatio* and *figere*, the latter perhaps because of its connection with the cross and crucifixion—originally "*crux figere*".<sup>122</sup> Other verbs used are more generic, without a specific technical meaning,<sup>123</sup> while in other instances the focus is on the passive reception of the rite (*accipere, adhibere, collocare*), notably in sermons discussing the initiation.<sup>124</sup> Once, when discussing the rite performed on

119 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2,3 (about Victorinus' conversion); *C. Faust.* VI, 9,2; *In Ps.* 32, 11, 2, 13; *In Ps.* 34, 11, 8; *In Ps.* 36, 11, 4; *In Ps.* 41, 2; *In Ps.* 46, 2; *In Ps.* 48, 11, 2; *In Ps.* 54, 12; *In Ps.* 56, 3; *In Ps.* 59, 9; *In Ps.* 68, 1, 12; *In Ps.* 69, 2; *In Ps.* 73, 6; *In Ps.* 75, 10; *In Ps.* 85, 14 *In Ps.* 95, 2; *In Ps.* 141, 9; *In Ps.* 143, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 3, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3 (about catechumens); *Io. eu. tr.* 36, 4; *Io. eu. tr.* 43, 9; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 53, 13; *Io. eu. tr.* 55, 1; *Io. eu. tr.* 118, 5 (about catechumens); *S.* 27, 6; *S.* 32, 12; *S.* 51, 1,2; *S.* 88, 9,8; *S.* 97A (= *Bibl. cas.* 11, 114–115), 3 (about catechumens); *S.* 107, 6,7; *S.* 160, 5–6; *S.* 174, 3; *S.* 215, 5 (to candidates for baptism); *S.* 218C (= *Guelf.* 3), 4; *S.* 272A (fragment), 1; *S.* 301A (= *Denis* 17), 8 (to catechumens); *S.* 302 (= 302 + *Guelf.* 25), 3 (to catechumens); *S.* 335D (= *Lambot* 6), 3; *S.* 342, 1; *S.* 360B (= *Dolbeau* 25), 24. *Passion: Cat. rud.* 20, 34 (to catechumens); *C. Faust.* XI, 30; *In Ps.* 86, 6; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2.

120 Respectively Augustine, *S.* 335K (= *Lambot* 21), 5; *S.* 352A (= *Dolbeau* 14), 3; *S.* 302 (= 302 + *Guelf.* 25), 3 (for *character* see *Pieri* (1998), 131) and *S.* 317, 4,5. *S.* 352A, 3 perhaps dates from 413 and is part of the debate about moral requirements for candidates to baptism further developed in *F. et op.*

121 *Portare*: Augustine, *In Ps.* 32, 11, 2, 13; *In Ps.* 41, 2; *In Ps.* 48, 11, 2; *In Ps.* 59, 9; *In Ps.* 69, 2; *In Ps.* 73, 6; *In Ps.* 85, 14; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 3 (about catechumens); *S.* 27, 6; *S.* 32, 12; *S.* 88, 9,8; *S.* 107, 6,7; *S.* 160, 5–6; *S.* 302 (= 302 + *Guelf.* 25), 3 (to catechumens). *Habere*: Augustine, *In Ps.* 86, 6; *In Ps.* 143, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 7; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2; *S.* 32, 12; *S.* 335K (= *Lambot* 21), 5. *Gestare*: Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 3, 2; *S.* 342, 1. *Gerere*: Augustine, *S.* 97A (= *Bibl. cas.* 11 114–115), 3 (about catechumens).

122 *Signare*: Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 20, 34; *C. Faust.* XI, 30; *In Ps.* 46, 2; *In Ps.* 69, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2; *S.* 107, 6,7; *S.* 272A (fragment), 1; *S.* 335D (= *Lambot* 6), 3; *S.* 352A (= *Dolbeau* 14), 3 (about catechumens). *Figere*: *C. Faust.* VI, 9,2; *In Ps.* 34, 11, 8; *In Ps.* 54, 12; *In Ps.* 75, 10; *In Ps.* 95, 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 43, 9; *Io. eu. tr.* 53, 13; *S.* 174, 3; *S.* 301A (= *Denis* 17), 8 (to catechumens).

123 *Constituere*: Augustine, *In Ps.* 141, 9; *Ponere*: *Io. eu. tr.* 36, 4; *S.* 317, 4,5.

124 *Accipere*: *S.* 160, 5–6; *S.* 215, 5 (to candidates preparing for baptism); *S.* 301A (= *Denis* 17),

catechumens, Augustine resorts to the verb *depingere* ("to draw"), emphasising the visibility of the signing of foreheads.<sup>125</sup>

Augustine's frequent references to the rite and its social impact has led a number of scholars to suggest that foreheads may have been painted or even tattooed with the cross.<sup>126</sup> While criticism has soon been raised against this hypothesis, it is very difficult to demonstrate or reject it.<sup>127</sup> If no consensus has emerged, it is because Augustine's descriptions of marked foreheads are ambiguous, without any clue about the concrete way in which the sign was made. Beyond Augustine, the earliest references about the ritual are found in Tertullian, Cyprian and the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*.<sup>128</sup> Later evidence in the West further shows that the signing of foreheads with the cross was not only a common practice of Christians, associated with a power of exorcism, but an essential rite of the catechumenate—without however discussing how the initiation gesture was performed.<sup>129</sup> More broadly, the rite can be connected to pre-Christian religious practices, the signing of soldiers and the branding

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8 (to catechumens); *Adhibere*: *Io. eu. tr.* 118, 5 (about catechumens); *Collocare*: *S.* 218C (= Morin Guelf. 3), 4.

125 Augustine, *S.* 301A (= Denis 17), 8.

126 Dölger, F.J., (1929), 'Kreuz-Tätowierung im christlichen Altertum', *Antike und Christentum* 1, 202–211 at 208; Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 1, 89 n. 6 both referring to cross-shaped tattoos put on the forehead by locals in modern Algeria, although this is a far more widespread practice well beyond Christianity, see Renaut, L., (2004), *Marquage corporel et signation religieuse dans l'Antiquité* (École Pratique des Hautes Études, PhD. Thesis), 791–792. In favour of the visibility of the sign see as well: Pontet, M., (1945), *L'Exégèse de saint Augustin prédicateur* (Paris) 366–367 n. 204; Rondet, H., (1954), 'Miscellanea Augustiniana. La croix sur le front', *RecSR* (1954), 388–394 at 390–393; Dölger (1961), 12; Maertens (1962), 122.

127 Busch (1938), 417–418; Poque, *SC* 116 (1966), 22 n. 4; Mandouze (1968), 84 n. 3; Berrouard, *BA* 71 (1969), 210 n. 2; Renaut (2004), 780. See summaries in Madec (2001a), 29; Hammerstaedt, J., (1996), 'Crux', *AL* 2, fasc. 1/2, 146–152 at 147–148.

128 See Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 111, 22 and *De Corona* 3, 4 (for the daily practice of signing oneself, discussed in Rondet (1954), 391; Dölger (1958), 5–13; Renaut (2004), 764–765; Rebillard (2012a), 18); *De resurrectione mortuorum* 8, 3 (in connection to the initiation); Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 11, 16 (cross on the forehead as protection); *Apostolic Tradition* 20–21 (initiation) and 41–42 (daily practice) on which see Renaut (2004), 766–767 and 773–776. For broader surveys with more bibliography on signation with the cross in the early Church see Dölger, F.J., (1958–1959–1960–1961–1962–1963–1964–1965/1966–1967), 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzzeichens', *JbAC* 1, 5–19; 2, 15–29; 3, 5–16; 4, 5–47; 5, 5–22; 6, 7–34; 7, 5–38; 7/8, 7–52; 10, 7–29; Dinkler, E., (1967), *Signum crucis: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur christlichen Archäologie* (Tübingen), 26–75; Heinz, A., (1997), 'Kreuzzeichen', *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 6, 468–469; Heid, S., (2006), 'Kreuz', *RAC* 21, 1099–1148 at 1126–1128 and 1137–1139.

129 Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* IV, 20; Severus of Minorca, *Epistula* 17; Leo the Great, *Sermo* LV, 5; (Quodvultdeus of Carthage), *De symbolo* 1, 1.3 and Sy 3, 1.1; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 121, 8. In connection to the recitation of the creed: Ambrose, *Explanatio symboli* 3; Rufinus,

of slaves to mark ownership.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, scholars have attempted to relate archaeological evidence of ancient statues bearing crosses carved on the forehead with the Christian rite of initiation, although it seems that these markings on ancient statues are better understood in the context of the Christianisation of landscape and no clear connection can be made to the initiation.<sup>131</sup> Thus, it is possible but unsure that in Augustine's community the marking of foreheads left a visible sign. However, as has already been underlined for the rites of admission, Augustine's emphasis on the signing of the forehead seems to suggest that it may have been repeated during the catechumenate, perhaps together with other rites. The repetition of the rite would explain why it is so often evoked by Augustine to assert the Christian membership of his audience, both catechumens and baptised Christians. It is important to underline that the forehead was commonly understood as the seat of emotions and especially *pudor* and *verecundia* (shame and modesty) in social interactions.<sup>132</sup> Thus, *frons*, in Latin could more generally point to one's behaviour.

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*Apologia contra Hieronymum* 1, 5; Peter Chrysologus, *Sermones* 56, 5; 57, 16; 58, 2; 59, 18; 61, 2; 62, 3. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31, 8 condemns tattooing the body with the cross, while Jerome, *In Esaiam* xv, 55, 12–13 remarks that Christians are branded with the sign of the cross (“*crucis eius inurantur cauterio*”, Morin-Adriaen, *CCSL* 73A (1963), 629) and Mark the Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii* 82 mentions the painting, as a protection, of a visible but temporary sign on the middle of foreheads, the right hand and the right shoulder of three boys (see more in Dölger (1929), 204–208; Renaut (2004), 788–813; Heid (2006), 1136–1139).

130 Dölger, F.J., (1911), *Sphragis: eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn), 23–37; Dölger, F. J., (1930a) ‘*Sacramentum militiae*. Das Kennmal der Soldaten, Waffenschmiede und Wasserwächter nach Texten frühchristlicher Literatur’, *Antike und Christentum* 2, 268–280; Jones, C.P., (1987), ‘*Stigma*: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity’, *JRS* 77, 139–155, esp. 147–150; Gustafson, M., (2000), ‘The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond’, in Caplan, J., (ed.), (2000), *Written on the Body: the Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton NJ), 17–32; Rivièrè, Y., ‘Recherche et identification des esclaves fugitifs dans l’Empire Romain’, in Andreau, J., Virlouvet, C., (eds.), (2002), *L’information et la mer dans le monde antique* (Rome), 115–196; Renaut (2004), 327–404 and 793. On Jewish cross-shaped signa see Dinkler (1967) 27–35 (with criticism of Renaut (2004), 777–779).

131 See for the hypothesis: Dölger, F.J., (1930b), ‘Die antiken Köpfe mit dem stehenden und liegenden Kreuz’, *Antike und Christentum* 2, 281–296. For the practice in the context of Christianisation see Saradi, H., (1997), ‘The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence’, *IJCT* 3/4, 395–423, at 403–404, and a recent catalogue of marked statues: Kristensen, T.M., (2012), ‘Miraculous Bodies: Christian Viewers and the Transformation of ‘Pagan’ Culture in Late Antiquity’, in Birk, S., Poulsen, B., (eds.), (2012), *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity* (Aarhus), 31–66 and additions (in 2015 and 2016) on the personal page of Kristensen at academia.edu.

132 See *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 6, 1 (1912–1916), 1357–1358; Löfstedt, B., (1981), ‘*Frons* “Schan” und “Schamlosigkeit”’, *ACD* 24, 169–170.



This explains why Augustine often used the ritual as a powerful tool in his preaching: bearing the cross, performing the ritual, is an outward display of Christian belonging which requires a corresponding inward belonging manifested through a visible change of conduct.<sup>133</sup> While the importance of this ritual for Augustine's moral preaching to his audience in general appears clearly through the many references that he made to the ritual in the course of his life, a focus on the few references explicitly pointing to catechumens shows that they were clearly included in Augustine's preaching. Augustine's addresses to catechumens provide evidence of their involvement in the community through this rite and contain allusions to their broader inclusion in the community in terms of beliefs and other rituals.

Perhaps in the early 400s, preaching on Psalm 141 and referring to the rite of the cross on the forehead, Augustine speaks of many rites received, some in the mouth, others in the whole body, perhaps hinting at the variety of ritual practices that catechumens could have undergone.<sup>134</sup> Addressing catechumens in Bulla Regia, Augustine rebukes them against attending shows in the theatre and refers to their Christian belonging, in particular in connection to the sign of the cross:

Do you have one forehead on which you received the sign of Christ, and another which you carry along to the theater? Do you want to go? Change your forehead, and get along there. So, as you can't change your forehead, don't ruin it. The name of God is invoked over you, Christ is invoked over you, God is invoked over you, the sign of Christ's cross is sketched and fixed for you on your forehead.<sup>135</sup>

In an undated cento composed of various sermons,<sup>136</sup> Augustine remarks about catechumens: "they already bear the sign of Christ on their foreheads, they

<sup>133</sup> See a thorough discussion of this point in Pignot (2019).

<sup>134</sup> Augustine, *In Ps.* 141, 9 (perhaps in Hippo, see Müller (2001), 824; for the dating Hombert (2000), 344 n. 8).

<sup>135</sup> Augustine, *S.* 301A (= Denis 17), 8: "*Alia frons tua accepit Christi signum, et aliam tollis ad theatrum? Ire vis? Muta frontem, et vade. Ergo frontem, quam non potes mutare, noli perdere. Nomen dei super te invocatur, Christus super te inuocatur, deus super te invocatur, signum crucis Christi tibi in fronte depingitur atque figitur*" (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 89; Hill, *WSA* 111/8 (1994), 297). Scholars have suggested a dating before 400 but evidence is scarce: see hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 163.

<sup>136</sup> Augustine, *S.* 97A (= Bibl. cas. II, 114–115); a section of the text is extracted from *S.* 360B (= Dolbeau 25) 18, 20, 21; see Gryson (2007), I, 237. For hypotheses favouring an early dating before 400 see Verbraken (1976), 158.

already enter the church, they already call upon this name that is above every name, and yet they are still carrying the burden of their sins".<sup>137</sup> Similarly, in a homily on the Gospel of John, part of a series preached over winter and spring, perhaps in 406–407, often pointing to catechumens in the audience, and traditionally situated in Hippo, the bishop explains that catechumens, as believers in Christ, sign themselves when they state their belief ("*credo*") and carry the cross on their forehead.<sup>138</sup> These references reveal the integration of catechumens in the community through rituals and show how Augustine employed the sign of the cross to bring catechumens to assert their Christian membership and follow the same rules of behaviour as the baptised Christians. In a sense, Augustine aimed at erasing differences based on the baptismal initiation to bring catechumens to follow the same standards as the baptised. Augustine's resort to this rite when addressing catechumens in moral exhortations is a clear illustration of its significance for their Christian belonging.

Similar descriptions are found in sermons preached on John 9, 1–41 about the healing of the man born blind, as Augustine notes that catechumens have heard Christ's name and believe in him.<sup>139</sup> As the anointed blind man, catechumens can preach about Jesus despite not knowing Him yet.<sup>140</sup> In his letters to catechumens Augustine also emphasises the—although partial—inclusion of catechumens into the community: Marcianus is a believer and a "brother in Christ", while Firmus has a good knowledge of Christianity and is a keen reader of Augustine's works.<sup>141</sup> These allusive references give some clues about the practices of catechumens and their integration into the community. They hint at the possibility that catechumens were included in the community through

137 Augustine, S. 97A (= Bibl. cas. 11, 114–115), 3: "*Iam enim signum Christi gerit in fronte, iam intrat ecclesiam, iam per eum tantum nomen invocatur; sed adhuc sarcinam peccatorum suorum portat*" (Morin, MA 1 (1930), 416; Hill, WSA 111/ (1992), 41).

138 Augustine, Io. eu. tr. 11, 3: "*Tales sunt omnes catechumeni; ipsi iam credunt in nomine Christi, sed Iesus non se credit eis. Intendat et intellegat caritas vestra. Si dixerimus catechumeno: credis in Christum? Respondet: credo, et signat se; iam crucem Christi portat in fronte, et non erubescit de cruce domini sui. Ecce credidit in nomine eius*" (Willems, CCSL 36 (1954), 111). For this preaching series see Chapter 4 note 26.

139 Augustine, S. 136A (= Mai 130), 1 (undated); 136B (= Lambot 10), 1 (undated, see Verbraken (1976), 169); Io. eu. tr. 44, 2. This latter sermon is part of a series including Io. eu. tr. 17–19 and 23–54, situated in Hippo with little evidence, and dated from 414–415 probably 414, see Berrouard, M.-F., (1971), 'La date des *Tractatus I–LIV in Iohannis Evangelium* de saint Augustin', *RecAug* 7, 105–168, at 121–168; Berrouard, M.-F., BA 72 (1977), 26–41 reprinted in Berrouard, M.-F., (2004), *Introduction aux homélies de saint Augustin sur l'Évangile de saint Jean* (Paris), 90–99; Berrouard, M.-F., BA 73A (1988), 9–15.

140 Augustine, Io. eu. tr. 44, 8.

141 Augustine, Ep. 258, 4–5; Ep. 2\*, 4–5.

more frequent ritual activities than generally assumed. The sign of the cross, often evoked in Augustine's preaching, is thus perhaps only the most visible element of the catechumen's participation in religious activities.

In all the sermons and letters quoted above, however, Augustine employed the partial inclusion of catechumens as the starting point to invite them to baptism, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter. Catechumens were on the threshold: Augustine expected them to complete a transformation process which involved changing one's perspectives and status. While he often preached to them on the same terms as the baptised Christians, particularly resorting to the shared ritual practice of the sign of the cross, their shared belief in God and their participation in the liturgy, he also emphasised that they could become full members only by asking for baptism and entering the intensive preparation in the weeks preceding Easter. In the meantime, this partial integration was concretely experienced through rites of exclusion.

## 2.2 *Leaving Catechumens Behind: The disciplina arcana and the Dismissal*

Augustine's sermons provide consistent evidence for the exclusion of catechumens from the core celebrations of the liturgy. Hiding the core mysteries of Christianity to those who were not initiated was a widespread practice in early Christianity, noticed by scholars since the early modern period and called the *disciplina arcana*.<sup>142</sup> This practice is well attested in Augustine, where it is often the Eucharist, as the rite of the faithful (*sacramentum fidelium*), which is said to be unknown and not open to the catechumens.<sup>143</sup> Augustine also underlined that only the baptised knew that the names of martyrs were mentioned at the altar, thus probably alluding to parts of the Eucharistic liturgy from which catechumens were excluded.<sup>144</sup> Avoiding talking in great detail about the Euchar-

142 On the *disciplina arcana* and the historiographical developments of the concept, with bibliography, see Perrin, M.-Y., (2008), 'Arcana mysteria ou ce que cache la religion. De certaines pratiques de l'arcane dans le christianisme antique', in Riedl, M., Schabert, T., (eds.), (2008), *Die religiöse Erfahrung. Religions—The Religious Experience* (Würzburg), 119–141 and Perrin, M.-Y., (2009), 'Norunt fideles. Silence et eucharistie dans l'orbis christianus antique', in Bériou, N., Caseau, B., Rigaux, D., (eds.), (2009), *Pratiques de l'Eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident*, 2 volumes (Paris), II, 737–763.

143 Augustine, S. 131, 1: "Sacramentum fidelium agnoscunt fideles. Audientes autem quid aliud quam audiunt?" (PL 38 (1841), 729).

144 Augustine, S. 159, 1: "Ideoque habet ecclesiastica disciplina, quod fideles noverunt, cum martyres eo loco recitantur ad altare dei, ubi non pro ipsis oretur" (PL 38 (1841), 868); S. 297, 2.3: "Unde, quod norunt fideles, distincti a defunctis loco suo martyres recitantur" (PL 38 (1841), 1360); S. 306E (= Dolbeau 18), 1: "Denique, sicut fideles norunt, inter sacramenta christiana pro martyribus non oramus" (Dolbeau (2009), 210).

ist and how it was performed, Augustine often distinguished the baptised from the catechumens by stating that they could not know what the faithful celebrated, or emphasising that only the baptised knew what he was referring too, most often when discussing the Eucharist and with the objective to trigger the decision of catechumens to enrol for baptism.<sup>145</sup>

This contrasts quite sharply with all the evidence about the catechumens' inclusion in the community. While catechumens were never considered on the same level as pagans or any other category of people external to Christianity, they were still strikingly excluded from the core rites of the *fideles*, which, according to Augustine, would grant them the hope of eternal life. In his treatise on baptism against Donatists, Augustine explained that he would prefer a good Catholic catechumen over a baptised heretic; however, he added that without baptism the former would not be saved.<sup>146</sup> When discussing the rites of catechumens in the *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* written in the winter 411–412, Augustine again asserted that without baptism the rites of catechumens were useless to enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>147</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, in sermons of invitation to baptism, Augustine similarly stressed that catechumens had not been forgiven for their sins and could not enter the kingdom after death.<sup>148</sup> The lack of full ritual integration, made explicit in every

145 See for instance Augustine, *In Ps.* 80, 8: “*Quid ergo times, qui nondum venisti, venire ad baptismum Christi, transire per mare rubrum? [...] Percepturus es mysteria quae non noveras. [...] Audies linguam quam non noveras, quam modo audiunt et recognoscunt, testantes et scientes qui norunt*” etc. (Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 39 (1956), 1124); *In Ps.* 103, 1, 14: “*Quid est quod occultum est, et non publicum in ecclesia? Sacramentum baptismi, sacramentum eucharistiae*” (Gori-Pierantoni, *CSEL* 95/1 (2011), 130); *In Ps.* 109, 17; *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4 and 12, 2–3; *S.* 28A (= Dolbeau 9), 4; *S.* 132, 1; *S.* 198aug (= Dolbeau 26), 12; *S.* 232, 7; *S.* 235, 3; *S.* 307, 2.3; *S.* 374aug (= Dolbeau 23), 19. Outside sermons see for example Augustine, *Ep.* 140, 19.48 (to the catechumen Honoratus): “*Hinc gratias agimus domino deo nostro, quod est magnum sacramentum in sacrificio novi testamenti, quod et ubi et quando et quo modo offeratur, cum fueris baptizatus, invenies*” (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 44 (1904), 196); *Trin.* 111, 10.21, and about mysteries in general *Ep.* 2\*, 4. For a discussion of some of the sermons see Busch (1938), 426–428; Perrin (2008); Harmless (2014), 197–200 and 276–280.

146 Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 21.28: “*Sicut autem bono catechumeno baptismum deest ad capessendum regnum caelorum, sic malo baptizato vera conversio*” (Petschenig, *CSEL* 51 (1908), 256).

147 Augustine, *Pecc. mer.* 11, 26.42: “*Ita sanctificatio catechumeni, si non fuerit baptizatus, non ei valet ad intrandum regnum caelorum aut ad peccatorum remissionem*” (Zycha, *CSEL* 60 (1913), 114). In *C. Iul.* 111, 26.62 Augustine states that catechumens are not freed from sin. Dölger (1961), 11 points here to the parallel found in Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 4.20: “*Credit autem etiam catechumenus in crucem domini Iesu qua et ipse signatur, sed nisi baptizatus fuerit [...] remissionem non potest accipere*” (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 97).

148 For instance: Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 1–5, *S.* 97A (*Bibl. Cas.* 114–115), 3; *S.* 132, 1.

liturgical celebration through the dismissal of catechumens after the sermon, concretely represented a separation that would endure in the afterlife.

The rite of dismissal is known to have been practised in several places in Late Antiquity.<sup>149</sup> An exploration of Augustine's evidence helps getting a better understanding of its function. Among the sermons referring to it, a particularly striking example, often quoted by scholars, illustrates the objective of such practice of exclusion and some issues of interpretation. As Lent had begun, probably in Hippo, Augustine explains the reading of the day containing an important passage about the Eucharist and the distinction between the catechumens and the baptised, John 6, 56–57 (*"Caro mea vere esca est, et sanguis meus vere potus est. Qui manducat meam carnem"* etc.).<sup>150</sup> The bishop remarks that the baptised could easily follow what was implied, while the *catechumeni* or *audientes* (hearers) "may have been hearing (*audientes*) what was being read, but could they also have been understanding (*intellegentes*)?"<sup>151</sup> He therefore invited catechumens to start the baptismal preparation in order to be fully initiated. Van der Meer took Augustine's remarks literally to argue that catechumens did not understand the sermons of Augustine and, consequently, that the catechumenate was in complete decline at his time.<sup>152</sup> Harmless has since underlined that such conclusions are based on the wrong assumption that only special instruction of catechumens could lead them to understanding and that sermons did not match such requirements. For Harmless, however, Augustine's preaching was an essential tool of communication used by the bishop to teach his catechumens.<sup>153</sup> Besides the fact, as I have underlined, that catechumens may have received special instruction, the sermon was meant to distinguish catechumens as an excluded body within the community to bring them to enrol for baptism as Lent had begun.<sup>154</sup>

The discussion about knowledge perhaps misses the point of Augustine's references. Indeed, this restricted understanding of the *disciplina arcana* has

149 See Borella (1939), 64–65 for Augustine and see below note 159.

150 Augustine, *S.* 132. The year of preaching is unknown; Hill, *WSA* III/4 (1992), 328 n. 1 suggests 420 without evidence and believes that the sermon was preached close to Easter because it states that Easter is coming. For the connection to the Lenten liturgy see my discussion in Chapter 4, pp. 145–146; Poque, *SC* 116 (1966), 22 and 352 and Poque (1971), 177 suggests the beginning of Lent, while Margoni-Kögler, M., (2010), *Die Perikopen im Gottesdienst bei Augustinus* (Vienna), 86–87 rather situates it during Lent.

151 Augustine, *S.* 132, 1: *"potuerunt esse cum legeretur audientes, numquid et intellegentes?"* (*PL* 38 (1841), 734; my translation). A similar distinction is found in *In Ps.* 109, 17.

152 Van der Meer (1961), 356–357 followed by Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 203 n. 206.

153 Harmless (2014), 182–183.

154 Other examples are Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 10–11–12; *S.* 97A (= *Bibl. Cas.* 114–115); *S.* 392.

led scholars like Kretschmar to conclude that hiding rituals had become a “fiction” in the fourth and fifth centuries: the creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Eucharist were not hidden but often explained in texts with a potentially wide circulation.<sup>155</sup> However, the *disciplina arcana* was not merely aimed at preventing individuals from knowing about the rites of initiation and gaining the intellectual capacity to comprehend the teaching on the Eucharist, but it kept the concrete knowledge of rituals and their true significance hidden by preventing catechumens from performing them.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, the sermon explicitly refers to the celebration of the Eucharist, underlining that the rite can only be apprehended by those who see and experience it concretely: “Some of you who heard this already do it, others not yet”.<sup>157</sup> Beyond a discussion about knowledge and understanding, I argue that the concrete implications of the *disciplina arcana* are particularly important for the status of catechumens: the dismissal enforced a strict division between groups within the community and the physical space of the church, corresponding to Augustine’s mention of a specific *locus* for catechumens. Catechumens were treated as a separate category of people in the church and were not fully integrated because some key mysteries—and in particular the celebration of the Eucharist—were not opened to them, and by this I mean physically accessible, not more than they were to pagans. What matters for Augustine is that liturgical performance should not be witnessed by catechumens in order to trigger their desire to be more fully included in the rituals. A detailed study of Augustine’s other references to the practice of dismissing catechumens better demonstrates this point.

Although the practice of dismissal was clearly important, Augustine refers to it only in passing, focusing instead on the implications of the ritual separation. In the context of an incident, the newly discovered sermon 359B (= Dolbeau 2), probably preached the 23rd of January 404 in Carthage,<sup>158</sup> provides

155 Kretschmar (1970), 157–158; similar although more nuanced views in Stenzel (1958), 147–153.

156 This is noted in Perrin (2008), 124–125 referring to the conclusions of de Roten (2005), 421–430 for John Chrysostom’s sermons. John argued that it does not matter whether one hears or sees the mysteries: only experiencing the power of the initiation truly gives knowledge about the mysteries. This applies to a great extent to Augustine as well, although he seems to have emphasised more the concrete separation of catechumens and baptised Christians.

157 Augustine, S. 132, 1: “*Qui audistis haec, aliqui iam hoc facitis, aliqui nondum*” (Hill, WSA III/4 (1992), 325; this text is found in all manuscripts used by the Maurists and preferable to their conjecture “*Qui audistis haec, nondum omnes intellexistis*”, PL 38 (1841), 734).

158 Dolbeau (2009), 315–327 (commentary), 331 (text); Ciccolini, BA 77A (forthcoming).

the first evidence of the dismissal and of the use of specific terms to designate it. Augustine preached that day to call for more obedience in the audience: the day before, part of the crowd was upset because it could not hear Augustine speaking from the apse and wanted him to preach from the centre of the basilica. As Augustine refused and left the pulpit, the crowd angrily called for the dismissal—and thus for the liturgy to proceed without the sermon—by shouting “*missa fiant*” and “*missa fac*”.<sup>159</sup> From Sermon 49, preached again in Carthage at the *mensa Cypriani*, perhaps in 418,<sup>160</sup> it can be inferred that the call to proceed with the liturgy (*missa*), particularly concerned the dismissal of catechumens. Augustine preached on justice that day, and his developments exhorting the audience to work for justice led him to comment on the Lord's Prayer. But before discussing the prayer he explained:

Look—after the sermon there's the dismissal of the catechumens (*missa catechuminis*). The faithful (*fideles*) will stay behind. We shall come to the place in the service for prayer. You know what it is we are going to draw near to. What are we going to say to God first? *Forgive us our debts, just as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6, 12).<sup>161</sup>

Moreover, in a letter written in spring 411, narrating to Albina the visit to Hippo of her son Pinianus with his wife Melania, Augustine explains that the crowd tried to force him to ordain Pinianus a priest just before he “dismissed the catechumens (*dimisimus catechumenos*)”.<sup>162</sup> These passages, mentioning by chance what was a widespread practice, make clear that catechumens

159 Augustine, S. 359B (= Dolbeau 2), 6, 20, 23. As Dolbeau (2009), 632 has noted, the use of the neutral *missa* cannot be held for a corruption of the text, but is already attested in liturgical manuscripts from Campania. *Missa* could designate other parts of the liturgy and especially oblation prayers, leading to the broader use of the term to refer to the Eucharistic celebration. See Mohrmann, C., (1958), ‘Missa’, *VChr* 12, 67–92 reprinted in Mohrmann, C., (1965), *Études sur le latin des chrétiens*, volume 3 (Rome), 351–376; Gamber, K., (1968b), ‘Missa. Von der dreifachen Bedeutung des Wortes’, *RQA* 63, 170–184; Griffe, E., (1974), ‘La signification du mot “Missa”’, *BLE* 75, 133–138; more bibliography in Sieben, H.J., (1979), *Voces* (Berlin), 334–335 and Klöckener (1998), 155 n. 82.

160 The sermon is preached on a Sunday after S. 48 (the preceding Sunday), shortly after Pentecost (see Verbraken (1976), 64).

161 Augustine, S. 49, 8: “*Ecce post sermonem fit missa catechuminis. Manebunt fideles. Venietur ad locum orationis. Scitis quo accessuri sumus. Quid prius deo dicturi sumus? Dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris* (Mt 6, 12)” (Lambot, *CCSL* 41 (1961), 620; Hill, *WSA* 111/2 (1990), 338 adapted).

162 Augustine, *Ep.* 126, 5 (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 44 (1904), 11). On the episode see Lancel (1999b), 437–442.

were physically excluded from the church after the sermon. Sermon 49 also shows that the recitation of the Lord's Prayer constituted another portion of the liturgy from which catechumens were excluded that triggered Augustine's interest, although less frequently than the Eucharist. Apart from the sermon just quoted, Augustine's other mentions of the catechumens' exclusion from the recitation of the Lord's Prayer are found in open polemics against Pelagians: in the final part of the *De sancta virginitate* and in two anti-Pelagian sermons, Augustine explains that the Lord's Prayer is prayed by the *fideles* and should only be recited by them because it cleanses daily sins committed after baptism, rather than sins forgiven through the rites of initiation. He links the fact that the verses from Mt 6, 12 are pronounced by baptised people to prove that even they sin—a way of arguing that is very close to his emphasis on rites of purifications performed on infants to justify the performance of infant baptism for the forgiveness of original sin.<sup>163</sup> Resorting to the liturgy in controversies, Augustine again reflected on particular distinctions in place in his community between catechumens and baptised Christians.

The clear line drawn in clerical discourse was concretely enforced through the practice of the dismissal. It should not be simply understood as an exclusion from understanding: Augustine never says that catechumens do not know the prayer—in contrast to what he may say about the Eucharist—but the crucial point is that they have no right to say it as a prayer during the liturgy. This link between the dismissal and the Lord's Prayer sheds light on the primary function of the dismissal. It was not only a rite emerging from the custom of keeping secrets away from the uninitiated. It separated groups, not on the ground of their abstract knowledge of rites, but of their concrete place within the physical space of the church and of their rights in the community. The dismissal prevented them from actively taking part in, or even simply being present during, the core liturgical celebrations. This is particularly obvious in

163 Augustine, *Uirg.* 48, 48: "*Alioquin hanc orationem catechumeni potius usque ad baptismum orare deberent. Cum vero eam baptizati orant, praepositi, et plebes, pastores et greges, satis ostenditur in hac vita, quae tota temptatio est, neminem se tamquam ab omnibus peccatis immunem debere gloriari*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 294). Hombert (2000), 110–136 has argued for dating the chapters starting at 37 from 412. The two sermons are: *In Ps.* 142, 6 (uncertainly dated, hypotheses ranging between 411 and 418 see Müller (2001), 824; Hombert (2000), 621–625 argues for the fifteenth of September 412); *S.* 181, 5–7 (perhaps preached in 416–417, see hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 97). More broadly, Augustine points to the Lord's Prayer's petition for the forgiveness of sins to highlight the necessity of daily repentance. See in particular *C. ep. Parm.* 11, 10.20; *Ep.* 153, 5.13; *S.* 110A (= Dolbeau 17), 8; 135, 6.7–7.8; 351, 3.5–3.6; 352, 2.7; 354A (= Dolbeau 14), 12. See Dupont (2012), 297–441 on the use of prayer in the Pelagian controversy with more bibliography.



the case of the Lord's Prayer because it is found in the Gospel of Matthew, but such a conclusion could be extended. Thus, more than a requisite of the *disciplina arcani*, the dismissal was essential to distinguish the catechumens from the baptised, by emphasising their peculiar status.

In an explanation on the Gospel of John, prepared by Augustine perhaps in 420 to be sent to Carthage, commenting on John 16, 12–13 ("*Adhuc multa habeo vobis dicere, sed non potestis portare modo. Cum autem venerit ille Spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem*"), the bishop noted that catechumens were perfectly able to understand the Scriptures:

How then, could not the disciples bear any of those things which were written after the Lord's ascension, even though the Holy Spirit was not yet sent to them, when now they are all borne by catechumens prior to their reception of the Holy Spirit? For although the sacraments of the faithful (*sacramenta fidelium*) are not revealed to them, it does not therefore happen that they cannot bear them; but in order that they may be all the more ardently desired by them, they are honorably concealed from their view.<sup>164</sup>

Catechumens are not prevented from understanding but from experiencing the rites of the faithful. The dismissal acted as a ritual barrier between distinctive groups and as an incentive to bring catechumens to seek fuller ritual integration.

This refined understanding of the function of the dismissal fits particularly well with Augustine's remarks found in two sermons from the 400s. First, preaching on ministers against Donatists perhaps in 407–408, Augustine notes that foreigners coming from outside Africa, because their face is unknown to the doorkeeper of the basilica, are questioned about their religious status before being allowed to enter: "You ask, 'Are you a pagan or a Christian?' He

164 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 96, 3: "*Quomodo ergo aliquid eorum quae post adscensionem domini scripta sunt, non possent ferre discipuli, etiam nondum sibi misso spiritu sancto, cum omnia nunc ferant catechumeni nondum accepto spiritu sancto? Quia etsi non eis fidelium sacramenta produntur, non ideo fit quod ea ferre non possunt; sed ut ab eis tanto ardentius concupiscantur; quanto eis honorabilius occultantur*" (Willems, *CCSL* 36 (1954), 570–571; Gibb, *NPNF* 7 (1888) revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701096.htm> adapted). The homily has been dated to Lent 420, as it is part of a series on John's Gospel (*Io. eu. tr.* 55–124) that Augustine started to dictate in late 419, see Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 74A (1993), 9–49 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 177–194. On the attraction for secrets, for instance Augustine, *S.* 51, 4.5 mentioned by Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 74B (1998), 284–285 n. 22.

answers, 'A Christian'; you see, he's one of God's sheep. You inquire whether he's a catechumen, perhaps, and is pressing on to the sacraments (*sacramenta*).<sup>165</sup> Here, the questioning at the threshold of the church is meant to make sure that *catechumeni* are kept away from rites reserved for the *fideles*. The newly discovered Sermon Dolbeau 7, preached as an addition to Augustine's Sermon 142aug, contains similar views about the distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles*. According to Dolbeau, this postscript after the sermon (*post sermonem*) was perhaps preached during a journey back from Carthage to Hippo, either in early 404 or in autumn 406 or 407,<sup>166</sup> following the invitation of the local bishop of an unknown community, who asked Augustine to say a few words about the burial of catechumens to handle a troublesome situation. A young catechumen had just died without baptism and his rich family was putting pressure on the local bishop to grant him a burial among the *fideles*, probably in a basilica. Augustine explained that the discipline of the church was clear and forbade such burials:

Still, you all ought to know, dearly beloved, what most of you and in fact almost all of you do know, that according to the Church's custom and discipline the bodies of catechumens who have died ought not to be buried among the bodies of the faithful, where the sacraments (*sacramenta*) of the faithful are also celebrated, and that such a concession should not be granted to anyone.<sup>167</sup>

165 Augustine, S. 46, 31: "*Quaeris 'paganusne es, an christianus?' Respondet: 'christianus': ovis est enim dei. Quaeris ne forte catechuminus sit, et irruat sacramentis*" (Lambot, *CCSL* 41 (1961), 557; Hill, *WSA* 111/2 (1990), 284). For the dating see Hombert (2000), 553–554 arguing against the traditional dating to 409–410.

166 From evidence of the now lost collection of Lorsch, Dolbeau concludes that our sermon followed S. 142aug (Dolbeau (2009), 297). The beginning of Dolbeau 7 makes clear that Augustine is invited to speak by a fellow bishop outside his own town. Because of the other sermons included in the portion of the old collection of Lorsch, in which S. 142aug is found, Dolbeau suggests that the *post tractatum* was either preached in early 404, when Augustine travelled back from Carthage to Hippo, or in autumn 406 or 407, again in a journey back from Carthage, during which Augustine preached S. 360C (= Dolbeau 27), see Dolbeau (2009), 298 and 631. Hill, *WSA* 111/11 (1997), 133–134 preferred 406.

167 Augustine, S. 142aug, *post sermonem* (= Dolbeau 7): "*Tamen omnes nosse debetis, carissimi, quod multi vestrum et omnes paene noverunt, secundum morem disciplinamque ecclesiae, catechumenorum defunctorum corpora inter fidelium corpora, ubi etiam fidelium sacramenta celebrantur, sepelire non debere nec cuidam posse concedi*" (Dolbeau (2009), 302; Hill, *WSA* 111/11 (1997), 131 adapted).

The rule well corresponds to the practice of dismissing catechumens from churches before the core part of the liturgy was celebrated, as noted by Dolbeau.<sup>168</sup> Thus, the ban against the burial of catechumens in churches was linked to their customary exclusion from places where liturgy was performed, even after their death.

Both sermons show that the dismissal was a matter of rights—depending on status (*gradus*)—to take part physically, dead or alive, to the liturgy following the sermon, because of the specific place (*locus*) reserved for *catechumeni* in the community. Augustine wanted to enforce the conviction that catechumens would not enjoy the hopes of the baptised after death. His refusal shows the significance of the distinction, while clear-cut divisions, as the family's request and Augustine's reply suggests, may have not been accepted or followed by everyone.<sup>169</sup> The distinction in terms of ritual integration between catechumens and baptised Christians deeply concerned Augustine, who aimed at enforcing it as an important rule.

The rite of the dismissal, as an integral part of the catechumens' experience, may have also been part of a broader ritual during Christian services meant to single out catechumens. While scholars have often referred to the repeated reception of salt by catechumens and hypothesised that it may have been linked to the dismissal, the dismissal may have constituted the final part of a broader series of rites performed on catechumens.<sup>170</sup> There is little evidence in Augustine about the concrete way of organising the dismissal, but hypotheses can be put forward. Dolbeau, followed by Klöckener and Harmless, has shown that the prayer "*Conversi ad Dominum*", which preceded the dismissal in Sermon 359B, was simply the customary prayer ending each sermon, to be distinguished—against what was previously assumed by scholars—from the prayer of the faithful taking place after the dismissal.<sup>171</sup> Klöckener added

168 Dolbeau (2009), 299; also Harmless (2004), 21 and Harmless (2014), 225 n. 166; Rebillard, *BA* 77A (forthcoming).

169 The same anxiety and hope to obtain eternal life among catechumens is evoked and solved in the Coptic Manichaean *Kephalaia* XC1 (Böhlig (1940), 228–234), where Mani is asked to clarify the destiny of catechumens within the community; in reply Mani explains that catechumens living a perfect life will be saved. Augustine's knowledge of Manichaean practices and ideas may also have provided a further incentive for him to go against such views—if they were similarly held by Manichaeans in North Africa at his time—and enforce more strictly the distinction between catechumens and baptised Christians, underlining the necessity of baptism.

170 See note 3.

171 Dolbeau, F., (2009), 171–175; then Klöckener (1998), 154–157 and Harmless (2004), 27–28. See also Klöckener, M., (1994), 'Conversi ad dominum', *AL* 1, fasc. 7/8, 1280–1282.

that the dismissal of catechumens immediately followed the *Conversi* prayer, with a short formula, “*missa fiant*”, and without any special rites or prayers.<sup>172</sup> However, distinguishing the *Conversi* prayer from the formal prayer of the faithful should not lead us to conclude that there were no additional prayers for catechumens in between, in connection with their dismissal. Klöckener’s conclusions are perhaps influenced by the fact that the crowd in Sermon 359B requested to quickly proceed with the dismissal, using the generic formula “*missa facere*”. Thanks to Sermon 360B (= Dolbeau 25), perhaps preached in December 403, we know that pagans were also formally dismissed.<sup>173</sup> Penitents should also be added to the picture: as noted by Harmless, in a sermon preached on Tuesday after Easter, Augustine tells of penitents who queued to receive a blessing: “There are a great many penitents here; when hands are laid on them, there is an extremely long line”.<sup>174</sup> In view of the evidence, it remains entirely plausible that after the *Conversi* prayer, pagans, catechumens and penitents were successively dismissed with special prayers, before the prayer of the faithful took place—perhaps particularly on special occasions or feasts, such as Easter.<sup>175</sup> Sermon 359B only shows that the crowd wanted to proceed with the impatiently awaited (and perhaps lengthy dismissal), “*missa*” in the plural referring to a number of special prayers pronounced at the dismissal.<sup>176</sup> It is worth suggesting, even if this has to remain a broad hypothesis in the lack of clear available evidence, that when catechumens were dismissed they may have queued to receive some specific rites evoked in the first part of this chapter, as the sign of the cross on the forehead, the giving of salt, the blessing, the laying on of hands and exorcisms.<sup>177</sup> Thus, along with the ceremonies of dismissal for pagans and penitents, the catechumens’ status could have been particularly well highlighted, as they were progressively included through the prayer and some special rites and at the same time excluded by being forced to leave the building with the other excluded categories in the audience.

<sup>172</sup> Klöckener (1998), 155–157.

<sup>173</sup> Augustine, S. 360B (= Dolbeau 25), 28: “*Et postquam pagani egressi sunt*” (Dolbeau (2009), 244; dating *ibid.* 626).

<sup>174</sup> Harmless (2014), 224 who also hypothesised that catechumens may have received salt at their dismissal; Augustine, S. 232, 8: “*Abundant hic paenitentes; quando illis inponitur manus, fit ordo longissimus*” (Poque, SC 116 (1966), 274; Hill, WSA 111/7 (1993), 28).

<sup>175</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 217, 1.2 referring to distinctive prayers for pagans, catechumens and faithful at the altar—most probably pronounced during the Eucharistic service—may also hint at the fact that other special prayers took place at the dismissal.

<sup>176</sup> See note 159 for *missa* that could both refer to the dismissal and prayers.

<sup>177</sup> The *Apostolic Tradition* 19 (Bausi (2011), §15) mentions the laying on of hands as part of the rite of dismissal of catechumens.

### 3 Conclusion

While most scholarship has focused on the admission process and has only taken notice of the dismissal of catechumens and the *disciplina arcani*, the catechumens' membership may have entailed a more complex set of rites meant to single them out as a specific group within the community. All began at the admission into the catechumenate: a comparison of the *De catechizandis rudibus* with the *Contra Faustum* has shown that the first session included catechesis based on Bible history, perhaps with the physical display of books, as Augustine particularly emphasised against Manichaeans the importance of the prophecies on Christianity, but also more generally the need to teach new recruits about Christian behaviour. A number of rites complemented the catechesis to incorporate candidates as *catechumeni* into the community—a blessing, a laying on of hands, a marking of the cross on the forehead, a giving of salt, and most likely the *exsufflatio*. There seems to have been no restriction in terms of age to enter the catechumenate, Augustine clearly referring to catechumens of a very young age and to their involvement in the subsequent baptismal preparation.

The admission into the catechumenate, however, was not an isolated moment. I have shown that Augustine often employs the term *sacramentum* when presenting the ritual initiation of converts, not with the restrictive meaning of “sacrament” but to refer to a set of rites performed by the candidate as proof of his initiation and commitment to his status of catechumen.<sup>178</sup> The *sacramentum* of catechumens in Augustine more broadly encompasses all ritual actions of initiation performed by, and on, catechumens.<sup>179</sup> Thus, against com-

178 Mohrmann, C., (1954), ‘*Sacramentum* dans les plus anciens textes chrétiens’, in *HThR* 47, 141–152 reprinted in Mohrmann, C., (1958b), *Études sur le latin des Chrétiens*, volume 1 (Rome), 233–244, at 237–238 suggested that *sacramentum* often refers to a combination of legal and sacred aspects of a commitment, a definition which is quite close to Augustine's understanding. *Sacramentum* was also employed for military oaths, see Dölger (1930); for the Early Middle Ages: Esders, S., (2009), *Sacramentum fidelitatis. Treueidleistung, Militärorganisation und Formierung mittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit*, 2nd edition (Berlin).

179 Several studies of *sacramentum* in Augustine have demonstrated the wide range of meanings that can be associated with the word. *Sacramentum* as a rite or series of rites appears to be one of the most commonly attested meanings. See in particular Couturier, M., (1953), ‘“Sacramentum” et “mysterium” dans l’œuvre de saint Augustin’, in Rondet-Le Landais-Lauras-Couturier (1953), 161–274; Berrouard, M.-F., (1961), ‘*Similitudo* et la définition du réalisme sacramentel d’après l’*Épître xcvi*, 9–10, de saint Augustin’, *REAug* 7, 321–337; Mandouze, A., (1963), ‘À propos de “Sacramentum” chez S. Augustin. Polyvalence lexicologique et foisonnement théologique’, in *Mélanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht-Antwerpen), 222–232; Studer, B., (1975), ‘“Sacramentum et exem-

mon assumptions, allusions to rites for catechumens do not necessarily pertain to a well-ordained single ritual session at the admission, as if catechumens would only perform rites on that occasion. While Canon 3 of the council of Hippo already makes clear that salt was given frequently, Augustine's writings lead to the same conclusion: catechumens had a *sacramentum* of their own, received some food—perhaps only salt—together with the laying of hands and the marking of the candidates' foreheads. Such rites may have been performed on a regular basis—and notably at the time of prominent feasts like Easter—and served as a way to confirm the catechumens' commitment. These rites may also have been coupled—as suggested thanks to an illuminating passage of the *De fide et operibus*—with special instruction reserved for *catechumeni*, which however has left no clear traces in preserved sermons.

The rites of *catechumeni* had both the function to emphasise their inclusion into the community and the extent to which they were barred from sharing the rites of the baptised. For Augustine, besides regular attendance at church services, the rite of signing the forehead with the cross in particular was essential for showing their inclusion and belonging to the community. Repeated throughout the initiation process, it illustrated the progressive incorporation of catechumens, who were required, in Augustine's preaching, to conform their lifestyle to this new belonging. The rite may also have been part of a number of other actions performed on catechumens, like prayers and invocations, which may have taken place at the time of the dismissal from the church, highlighting their gradual and incomplete inclusion. The dismissal and the *disciplina arcani* stressed the limits of their rights in terms of physically taking part in the rites of the baptised. The objective was to trigger the catechumens' decision to enter the baptismal preparation and thus bring them to the status of *fideles*.

The importance of rites for catechumens may also explain why Augustine particularly mentioned them in polemics. Most references to the catechesis, the rites of admission into the catechumenate and other rites are found in polemical writings, first against Manichaeans, then against Donatists, and finally during the Pelagian controversy. Augustine debated how catechesis should be given against Faustus; his insistence on the unacceptable repetition of the catechumenate for baptised Christians became an important polemical tool often employed against rebaptism—following a tradition already established in Optatus and carried on in Vandal Africa. Later, in the context of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine frequently pointed to the rites performed on

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plum" chez saint Augustin', *RecAug* 10, 87–141. For a survey on the term *sacramentum* with more bibliography: Phelan, O.M., (2014), *The Formation of Christian Europe. The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford), 8–47.

infants before baptism to argue for the necessity of infant baptism for the forgiveness of original sin. He also employed the exclusion of catechumens from the recitation of the Lord's prayer as proof that it was meant for cleansing the daily sins of the baptised, and similarly referred to the existence of special prayers for catechumens and baptised Christians as evidence for the necessity of God's grace.

Despite mostly allusive evidence, this study of the ritual practices of *catechumeni* shows that Augustine devoted special attention to their ritual integration and their moral instruction. The vigorous anti-Donatist polemic in particular makes patent that Augustine's evidence needs to be read in the context of deep rivalry over catechumens as much as over baptised Christians. The bishop of Hippo took every opportunity to deliver catecheses against his opponents, while he strove to bring catechumens to baptism on the basis of their partial ritual inclusion. Catechumens were a contested category because of their peculiar status in the community. The next chapter will further highlight the stakes of the initiation of catechumens and show how Augustine strove, in a variety of contexts, to bring them to baptism. Becoming a catechumen was only one step of the journey: the decision to seek baptism required dialogue and negotiation between catechumens and church authorities. Exploring this process makes it possible to reach a better understanding of what it meant, and why it mattered, to be a catechumen in late antique Africa.

## Catechumens Taking the Step: The Negotiation of Baptism in Augustine's Pastoral Care

Catechumens wishing to be baptised had to officially enrol for baptism, before they underwent an intensive ritual preparation. Enrolment for baptism, however, was not an easy decision but required a particular commitment and individual choice on the part of the catechumens. This was a challenging but essential step for Christian communities, bringing these distant members to fuller integration. This chapter is devoted to an exploration of Augustine's discussion of this decisive transition, while the next will focus on the rituals and teaching preceding baptism, the final part of the catechumenate.

Rejecting the stereotype of masses of catechumens postponing baptism until death, Rebillard and Harmless, without minimising the significance of catechumens, have come to the view that the delay of baptism among catechumens did not constitute a widespread problem.<sup>1</sup> While there is indeed no evidence to suggest that there were crowds of catechumens waiting for baptism until death, the implications of the status of catechumens for Augustine's pastoral care deserve further investigation. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that catechumens were a constant concern of Augustine as a peculiar category within his community that could envisage Christianity without baptism and that, particularly in a context of polemics and divisions affecting Christians in Africa, he saw the lack of baptism as a pastoral challenge. Beyond the well-known set of Lenten sermons of invitation to baptism that were part of the regular procedure of initiation and that have been well studied by Rebillard and Harmless, a greater body of sermons often related to a context of polemics, letters sent to influential catechumen friends in Carthage, and *exempla* promoting baptism in Augustine's treatises, show how much the integration of catechumens mattered to the bishop.<sup>2</sup> Examining this broader range of evidence offers new perspectives and gives a more detailed picture of how

1 See Rebillard (1998a), 285–292 translated in Rebillard (2013), 37–46; Rebillard (2012a), 65; Rebillard (2012b), 42; Harmless (2014), 229.

2 Rebillard (1998a), 292 n. 43 refers to Augustine's letters to catechumens in passing, while they are not discussed in Harmless (2014); a number of Augustine's invitations presented here are briefly mentioned in Monachino (1947), 169–170.



Augustine strove to bring greater cohesion within his community and of the role played by catechumens in this process.

Augustine's views, however, were not simply imposed on his audience: he negotiated baptism with catechumens, often in lively dialogues.<sup>3</sup> Catechumens could be eager to progress in their knowledge and practice of Christianity, but they still needed to be convinced of the need for baptism. Augustine took this task earnestly in a variety of contexts, beyond the customary liturgical calls to baptism. While the catechumens' voice is seldom heard in ancient sources, Augustine's attention to catechumens still provides an opportunity to shed some light on how they themselves considered their status within Christian communities. The bishop conveys ideas about concrete reasons which persuaded individuals to, or discouraged from, asking for baptism. The relevance of the Donatist controversy—where baptism is at the centre of attention—and of the polemics against the too strict or too lax views of catechumens also deserve careful consideration. The investigation thus highlights that the initiation of catechumens was a particularly fought over aspect of religious life in late antique Africa.

This chapter is divided into three parts, following Augustine's exhortations to catechumens successively in his preaching, correspondence and treatises, exploring the transition towards baptism and the pastoral stakes and challenges that it represented.

## 1 *Festina ad gratiam*: Calling for Baptism in Sermons

Sermons inviting catechumens to enter the baptismal preparation are the most obvious body of evidence to see Augustine at work and to get a sense of the significance of this pastoral activity. These sermons can be divided into three groups: sermons clearly or probably preached close to or during Lent or the Easter period, sermons with no clearly identifiable liturgical setting, and sermons preached outside of the mentioned periods. Thus the spread of the evidence shows that while Augustine made regular liturgical calls every year in Lent, he also exhorted catechumens to baptism throughout the year, often in a context of polemics, particularly against Donatists. In the shape of imagined dialogues, the sermons discuss the catechumens' attitude, employ a specific imagery intended to highlight the incompleteness of their ritual

3 Augustine's literary production more broadly has to be understood as the result of interaction with his audience see Introduction, pp. 27–29 with notes 77 and 81.

integration, and underline the reasons which should bring them to enter baptismal preparation in Augustine's community.

### 1.1 *Customary Exhortations during Lent*

Augustine's calls to baptism in Lent are somewhat different from other exhortations outside this specific liturgical context.<sup>4</sup> Here, Augustine's admonition corresponds to a widespread liturgical practice, the yearly enrolment of new candidates to prepare for baptism.<sup>5</sup> The sermons *Io. eu. tr.* 10–11–12—part of a longer preaching series on the Gospel of John and the Gradual Psalms, held over a number of weeks in winter-spring of a given year between 405 and 411—enable us to follow Augustine's calls on three different days over a period of a week or more at the time of Lent.<sup>6</sup> As Berrouard has well emphasised, all the sermons of this series bear a strong anti-Donatist tone, suggesting that Donatists were an immediate concern of Augustine at the time.<sup>7</sup> The audience seems to have been quite variegated, with both wealthy and poor, educated and uneducated individuals, and baptised and unbaptised Christians. *Io. eu. tr.* 10 follows the day after *Io. eu. tr.* 9. Using standard anti-Donatist arguments, Augustine accuses some in his audience of turning to the Donatists when prohibited to consult astrologers and, commenting on the story of Jesus chasing the merchants from the temple, he states that the Donatists buy and sell members and baptism alike, and pride themselves on giving the Spirit, while his church admits everyone for free and does not grant anything by itself.<sup>8</sup> The end of the sermon, focusing on Jesus' saying about rebuilding the temple in three days, triggers Augustine's first call to catechumens: as Easter, the feast of the Resurrection, is to be celebrated, he asks those who are catechumens to prepare themselves to receive grace, concluding that "right now is the time, right now let that be in labour which then may be born".<sup>9</sup> Thus, Augustine's first call comes from the commentary of the Gospel itself (John 2, 12–21) at the appropriate time of the year; the opposition of a "now" (*nunc*) and a "then" (*tunc*) with

4 A number of the calls here discussed are analysed in some detail in Poque (1971), 176–178.

5 See the next chapter for a discussion of this ceremony and its rituals.

6 For a detailed study of Augustine's preaching to catechumens in this series: Harmless (2014), 235–283 esp. 275–279. There is uncertainty about the specific dating of these sermons, in particular in relation to the enrolment ceremony, see our discussion in the next chapter.

7 Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 71 (1969), 29–36 and 78–113 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 27–38 and 55–78.

8 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 10, 1 and 4–7 (for a synthesis of Augustine's anti-Donatists arguments see Berrouard, *BA* 71 (1969), 86–101).

9 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 10, 10: "*Iam nunc tempus est, iam nunc parturiatur quod tunc nascatur*" (Willems, R., *CCSL* 36 (1954), 107; Rettig, J., *FOC* 78 (1988), 222).

a fitting "*tempus*" puts into perspective the preparation that the catechumens are required to undergo, depicted through the imagery of imminent birth.

The next sermon, on a Sunday, some days later, comments on an even more appropriate reading, Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus and notably John 3, 5, a key passage, frequently employed by Augustine to highlight the necessity of baptism.<sup>10</sup> As the crowd was bigger and the day more festive, it is understandable, particularly in the context of rivalry with Donatists, that Augustine made the most of that Sunday to call catechumens to baptism through the commentary of a central text. As in the previous sermon, Augustine refers to the liturgical setting of the call and points to their peculiar intermediary status requiring baptism:

For it is the time for us to exhort you who are still catechumens, who believe in Christ in such a way that you still carry your own sins. But no one, burdened with sins, will see the kingdom of Heaven; for unless he has been forgiven them, he will not reign with Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Basing his sermon on a detailed commentary of the Gospel, Augustine offers a nuanced description of catechumens: "And because catechumens have the sign of the cross on their foreheads, they are already from the great house; but let them become sons from servants. For they are not to be thought of as nothing who already belong to the great house."<sup>12</sup> Augustine continues explaining that they are not sons because they have not been fully initiated and therefore have

<sup>10</sup> Augustine employs it, generally in combination with other quotations, in baptismal polemics against Donatists and particularly Pelagians (for the necessity of infant baptism), but more broadly as a landmark quotation to demonstrate the need for baptism. For instance, it is also quoted in his letter to Firmus, discussed below in part 2 of this chapter. For the significance of this verse in Augustine, with references, see Dupont (2010) and Dupont (2012), 279–287.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 1: "*Tempus est enim ut vos exhortemur, qui adhuc estis catechumeni, qui sic credidistis in Christum, ut adhuc vestra peccata portetis. Nullus autem regnum caelorum videbit oneratus peccatis; quia nisi cui dimissa fuerint, non regnabit cum Christo*" (Willems, *CCSL* 36 (1954), 109; Rettig, *FOC* 79 (1988), 9). For Poque (1971), 176 (followed by Harmless (2014), 277), Augustine's reference to catechumens (*adhuc catechumeni*) may imply that some had already enrolled after the first sermon. Nevertheless, catechumens are by definition "still" unbaptised in comparison to the rest of the audience. Indeed the phrase is found in generic contexts elsewhere to contrast catechumens and baptised Christians (see for more details p. 189 note 49).

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 4: "*Et quod signum crucis habent in fronte catechumeni, iam de domo magna sunt; sed fiant ex servis filii. Non enim nihil sunt qui iam ad domum magnam pertinent*" (Willems, *CCSL* 36 (1954), 112; Rettig, *FOC* 79 (1988), 13).

not received the Eucharist, which is compared to the manna granted after the crossing of the Red Sea, a figure of baptism. They are ignorant like Nicodemus: they should be ashamed of their lack of baptism, which is not necessary for God but for them. After this contrasting description, catechumens are invited to baptism.<sup>13</sup> The sermon then progressively shifts to polemics against rebaptism, comparing birth in the Catholic Church and among heretics with births from Sarah and servants of Abraham, and discussing at length the types of Christians and the unique and unrepeatable character of baptism, independent from the administrator, with allusions to the persecution of Donatists and their practice of rebaptism starting with the repetition of the catechumenate.<sup>14</sup> The final call to baptism in this series takes place a few days later, again in front of a bigger audience than usual: recalling his Sunday preaching, Augustine returns to Nicodemus and the imperfect status of catechumens to offer another catechesis with the same anti-Donatist arguments on baptism.<sup>15</sup> Catechumens are urged to repent and be baptised in order to receive in return the trust they have put in Christ and finally share the Eucharist:

From that we have encouraged and do encourage our brothers, the catechumens. For if you should ask them, they have already believed in Jesus; but because they do not yet receive his body and blood, Jesus has not yet trusted himself to them. What are they to do that Jesus may trust himself to them? Let them be born again of water and the Spirit; let the Church which is pregnant with them bring them forth. They have been conceived; let them be brought forth into the light. Let them have breasts whereat they may be nourished. Let them not fear that they may be choked after their birth. Let them not withdraw from their Mother's breasts.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine then openly attacks Donatists, further extending the labour imagery to state the impossibility of being born twice from the mother Church, this time addressing the baptised Christians—again probably to dissuade them from

13 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 5.

14 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 10–15.

15 See as well on this sermon in Poque (1971), 76 and Harmless (2014), 279–280.

16 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 3: "*Inde hortati sumus, et hortamur fratres nostros catechumenos. Si enim interrogas eos, iam crediderunt in Iesum; sed quia nondum carnem eius et sanguinem accipiunt, nondum se illis credidit Iesus. Quid faciant, ut se illis credat Iesus? Renascantur ex aqua et spiritu, proferat ecclesia quos parturit. Concepti sunt, edantur in lucem; habent ubera quibus nutriantur, non timeant ne nati suffocentur, ab uberibus maternis non recedant*" (Willems, *CCSL* 36 (1954), 121; Rettig, *FOC* 79 (1988), 30).

passing to the Donatist's side and repeating the catechumenate.<sup>17</sup> Augustine further differentiates natural birth and the birth from the Spirit and emphasises the need of humility to receive baptism and the lightness of Jesus' yoke, quoting Mt 11, 30.<sup>18</sup>

These three sermons, therefore, particularly the last two, include very similar calls. The calls are strongly linked both to the Gospel and to a detailed refutation of Donatists: the catechumens receive a long lecture on the meaning, necessity and unicity of baptism and, by underlining their imperfect and inferior status through an elaborated imagery, they are invited to take a decisive step and undergo the rites of initiation. It is clear that stakes were high and the preaching cycle was well-prepared: Augustine commented the opportune Gospel text at the very time that he made the call to baptism, the Sunday sermon constituting the main staged call, while the two others respectively anticipated and repeated it.<sup>19</sup> Catechumens were asked to make the right choice, to enter the baptismal preparation in his community, while baptised Christians were warned not to enter the catechumenate in the opposing party—most probably Donatists were making similar calls at the same time. The vigorous anti-Donatist polemic makes patent that Augustine spoke in a context of rivalry over catechumens as much as over baptised Christians, and took the opportunity of delivering catecheses aimed at providing elementary teaching against his opponents. The perspective of catechumens is evoked: they consider themselves fully Christian, and, well aware of the controversy, they are in a position to choose their side. Their fear of baptism as a difficult burden to bear surfaces at times, but Augustine aims to compensate it by emphasising the downside of their intermediary status, particularly regarding the Eucharist and their fate in the afterlife.

These peculiar sermons are the best evidence of Augustine's activity as a preacher inviting catechumens to baptism. They show how calls were repeated over a number of days. Sermon 132 on John 6, 56–57, which is also clearly situated during Lent, offers parallel evidence. In this sermon, most probably preached in Hippo, in an unknown year, Augustine explicitly refers to the coming of Easter and turns the Gospel into a call for catechumens who have not yet started the preparation, distinguishing them from the *fideles* because they do not understand nor receive the Eucharist.<sup>20</sup> The call provides the opportunity

17 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 4.

18 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 5–6.

19 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11, 1 notes that the Gospel text particularly well fits with his calls.

20 Augustine, *S.* 132, 1: "*Ecce Pascha est, da nomen ad baptismum. Si non te excitat festivitas,*

of an exhortation to the baptised to lead good lives, particularly avoid heavy eating and drinking and adulterous relationships, to become worthy examples for the catechumens.<sup>21</sup> Other isolated sermons probably pertain to the same context, as they include similar calls, often with the same imagery, although it must be underlined that they do not contain evidence connecting them to Lent.

In a sermon dated with great uncertainty around 420, Augustine mainly discusses, as in Sermon 132, attitudes towards sexuality, marriage and celibacy.<sup>22</sup> Distinguishing between the *catechumeni*, *competentes*, *paenitentes* and *fideles* in the audience, he presents the duties of each group: *competentes* are asked, as in the *De fide et operibus*, to abstain from unlawful relationships which include keeping concubines and any relationship with a previously married individual. Similar instructions are given to the *fideles*, requiring them to repent for their sinful behaviour and taking the example of Theodosius' penance to exhort them. Finally, Augustine comes to *paenitentes* who are asked to enact the promised changes in their lives, and to the *catechumeni*, who are asked to desire baptism, following the example of the good faithful in the community.<sup>23</sup> Commenting on Lk 5, 31–32 (*"Non est opus sanis medicus, sed male habentibus; non veni vocare iustos, sed peccatores"*) in another fragmentary sermon, Augustine emphasises, as he does in his sermons on John quoted above, the catechumens' peculiar status as believers, slaves in the *domus* of God, still unforgiven sinners.<sup>24</sup> The sermon includes a detailed call, which is illuminating

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*ducat ipsa curiositas"* (PL 38 (1841), 735). More on this sermon and the *disciplina arcani* in Chapter 2, 2.2, pp. 129–130.

- 21 Augustine, S. 132, 2: "*Sed si catechumeni exhortandi sunt, fratres mei, ut ad tantam gratiam regenerationis accedere non morentur [...]. Estote exhortatores non sermonibus, sed moribus vestris: ut illi qui non sunt baptizati, sic festinent sequi vos, ut non pereant imitando vos*" (PL 38 (1841), 735).
- 22 Augustine, S. 392. Although it has been doubted, this sermon is generally considered as authentic (see Verbraken (1976), 156). It is preserved in the Sessorianus 55, a late fifth or early sixth-century manuscript, except §1 which is from another sermon (S. 162B): see Gryson (2007), 1, 255. Dating hypothesis in Hill, E., WSA 111/10 (1995), 425 n. 1 based on Augustine's mention of the fact that he has been presiding over baptism for many years.
- 23 Augustine, S. 392, 2–6. Catechumens are mentioned at 392, 2: "*Quod dico competentibus, audiant fideles; quod dico fidelibus, audiant competentes; quod dico competentibus et fidelibus, audiant paenitentes; quod dico fidelibus et competentibus et paenitentibus, audiant catechumeni, audiant omnes*" and 392, 6: "*Catechumenis dico: exardescite voluntate ad percipiendam gratiam. Sed eligite vobis in ecclesia dei quos imitemini*" (PL 39 (1841), 1710 and 1712).
- 24 Augustine, S. 97A (= Bibl. cas. 11, 114–115). This undated cento is situated during Lent by Poque on the basis of similarities with *Io. eu. tr.* 11 and S. 132, although it remains unsure, see Poque, SC 16 (1966), 23 and 352–353 and Poque (1971), 178.

about the ambiguity of the status of catechumens as highlighted by Augustine, and shows how he employed it to bring them to baptism. It also conveys a sense of the catechumens' reluctance to seek baptism:

And they mustn't say to themselves, "I'm afraid to become one of the faithful, in case I sin again afterward." After all, not to sin afterward is in their power; it's hardly in their power, is it, not to have sinned? There's something they can do about not sinning; what can they do in order not to have sinned? I mean, what's done is done; you can't make past deeds not to have been done; but as for future deeds, you do have the power not to do them. So why be seduced by this perverse argument of the Devil's? [...] "I can't," you say. So take refuge in him who can and does eliminate them. Come to grace. After all, you have received the power to, because it is written, *He gave them power to become children of God* (John 1, 12). So start being a child of his; you used to be a bad slave, yet you have already begun to be one in the great household. Where you have begun to be a slave, set your heart on being a son or daughter. Get yourself pardoned the sins you are lugging around. Why are you afraid of the ones that don't yet exist and not afraid of the ones that do? But when you have been made new by the forgiveness of sins, with all your past ones forgiven, if you receive here a long stretch of life, so live that good works follow upon your faith. Live up to what you have become, a child in the family of so great a father and householder, one over whom God's name is invoked.<sup>25</sup>

The same connection between baptism and a change of conduct is clear in another sermon on martyrs of uncertain date in which Augustine exhorts the audience to transform their habits and calls in particular catechumens to pre-

25 Augustine, S. 97A, 3–4 (= Bibl. cas. II, 114–115): "*Et non dicat sibi: 'timeo fieri fidelis, ne peccem postea'. Ut enim non peccet postea, habet in potestate: ut non peccauerit, numquid habet in potestate? Habet quod faciat, ut non peccet: quid facit, ut non peccauerit? Quod enim factum est, factum est: praeterita non potes facere non facta: quae autem futura sunt, potes non facere. Quare ergo perverso consilio a diabolo seducitur? [...] 'Non possum', inquis. Confuge ergo ad eum, qui illa delet. Veni ad gratiam. accepisti enim potestatem, quia scriptum est: dedit eis potestatem filios dei fieri (John 1, 12). Incipe ergo esse filius, qui eras malus servus, iam tamen in domo magna esse coepas. Ubi coepisti esse servus, affecta esse filius: donentur tibi peccata quae portas. Quid times quae non sunt, et non times quae sunt? Cum autem per remissionem peccatorum fueris innovatus, dimissis omnibus praeteritis, si accipis hic largum spatium vivendi, ut fidem tuam bona opera consequantur, sic vive, tamquam factus filius de familia tanti patris familias, quasi super quem inuocatur nomen dei*" (Morin, MA 1 (1930), 417–418; Hill, WSA 111/4 (1992), 41–42).

pare for baptism, even referring to an earlier call made the preceding day.<sup>26</sup> Finally, out of six sermons preached by Augustine on John 9, 1–41 on the healing of a man born blind, three include exhortations to catechumens to enrol for baptism.<sup>27</sup> Margoni-Kögler has suggested that these sermons on John should be placed during Lent, when John 9 was probably commonly read.<sup>28</sup> The particular setting of each of the sermons remains unsure, but it is clear that at least the three addressing catechumens, and another referring to the story as a figure of initiation,<sup>29</sup> intended to bring catechumens to baptism.<sup>30</sup> John 9, 1–41 tells that first Jesus healed the man born blind by covering his eyes with mud made from saliva, and asked him to wash them in the pool; then, after the man was cast out by the Pharisees, in a dialogue with Jesus, the man recognised that Jesus was not simply a prophet but the son of God. For Augustine these two steps represent, first a transformation of the body, then of the heart. The fact that the story involves a man born blind is significant for the interpretation. In the sermons, the story is always first applied to mankind, with an emphasis on original sin.<sup>31</sup> The reading is however particularly fitting for Augustine's invitations because it shows that any man is born uninitiated and unconverted. In Sermon 136A, Augustine relates the story to baptism, comparing the healing to the forgive-

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- 26 Augustine, S. 335H (= Lambot 26), 3: "*Hesterno die hortatus sum caritatem vestram: quicumque catechumini estis, ut ad lavacrum regenerationis, postpositis moris omnibus, festinetis; quicumque in peccatis et turpitudinibus, immunditiis, damnabiliter vivebatis, vitam mutetis, paenitentiam agatis, de vita non desperetis*" (Lambot, C., (1952), 'Nouveaux sermons de saint Augustin', 95–107, at 103, reprinted in *PLS* 2 (1960), 831).
- 27 Augustine, S. 136B (= Lambot 10), 1–3; 135, 1 and 5–6; *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2 and 8. These are of uncertain date, except *Io. eu. tr.* 44 perhaps from 414–415 (see Chapter 2 note 139).
- 28 Margoni-Kögler (2010), 87–90 and 314–315 n. 823 (for S. 135). The assumption (at 87) is based on two arguments: first, Augustine states in S. 136, 1 that the reading of John 9 is customary, suggesting a recurrent liturgical setting; second, the same reading is attested for Lent in early Medieval Rome (*Capitulare Evangeliorum* of the "Würzburg Comes" published by Morin, G., (1911), 'Liturgie et basiliques de Rome au milieu du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RBen* 28, 296–330 at 330); the second argument is obviously weaker. It is interesting to note, however, that Ambrose, *De sacramentis* III, 12–15 interprets the same Gospel story, relating the covering of the blind man's eyes with the enrolment for baptism and speaking against postponing.
- 29 Augustine, S. 136A (= Mai 130), 1.
- 30 Augustine, S. 136C (= Lambot 11), 1 seems addressed to baptised Christians, although its mention of baptism, the beginnings of faith and the Lord's prayer, could also well fit an audience of candidates for baptism. For S. 136B (= Lambot 10), Hill, *WSA* III/4 (1991), 366 n. 4 suggests that it may have been preached during Easter time because of a supposed (but far from evident) reference to the paschal candle in S. 136B, 2.
- 31 Augustine, S. 135, 1; 136, 1 (with a reference to the sins of the parents of the man born blind and of the necessity of baptising children on the account of original sin); 136A (= Mai 130), 1; 136B (= Lambot 10), 2; 136C (= Lambot 11), 2; *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 1.



ness of sins,<sup>32</sup> and in Sermon 135 he invites the unbaptised to seek the washing: "Let them all run to the giver of light, the restorer of sight, let them run, let them believe, let them receive mud made from spittle".<sup>33</sup> In Sermon 136B, Augustine more precisely identifies the catechumens with the blind man:

Those of you who have heard the name of Christ and have believed and have not yet been baptised are in the position of having had your eyes anointed. Wash and see [...]. However, what happened to this man in the body had not yet happened to him in the heart. Everything, you see, was designed to happen step by step.<sup>34</sup>

The two steps in the story correspond to the performance of the rite in the body and the following acknowledgement of God in one's heart. Similar and more developed thoughts are found in Augustine's homily on John 9, 1–41, probably preached in 414–415: catechumens are on the journey, they have met Jesus, who started the healing process, but they have not washed and have not confessed their faith in the son of God. Thus they need to wash in baptism and transform their habits in order to understand the Incarnation of the Word and receive the forgiveness of sins, symbolised by the blind man's healing.<sup>35</sup> The covered eyes of catechumens are a striking illustration of their liminal status, as their healing process has begun but is yet incomplete. All these sermons, most probably

32 Augustine, S. 136A (Mai 130), 1. Augustine continues explaining that when he was then interrogated by the Jews, after his bath, the man's heart was still covered and he could not yet see. The healing of the blind heart requires confession to Jesus. In this sermon Augustine interprets this confession as a reference to the need for penance (§1–3).

33 Augustine, S. 135, 1: "*Currant ad illuminatorem, currant, credant, accipiant lutum de saliva factum*" (PL 38 (1841), 746; Hill, WSA III/4 (1992), 346).

34 Augustine, S. 136B (= Lambot 10), 1: "*Quicumque nomen christi audistis et credidistis et nondum baptizati estis inunctos oculos habetis. Lavate et videte [...]. Quod autem huic iam contigerat in corpore nondum contigerat in corde. Gradibus enim suis sunt cuncta disposita*" (Lambot, C., (1938), 'Sermons inédits de S. Augustin sur l'aveugle-né de l'Évangile', RBen 50, 185–193, at 186).

35 Augustine, Io. eu. tr. 44, 2: "*Potest quidem aliter atque aliter tanti sacramenti exponi profunditas et pertractari; sed hoc sufficiat caritati vestrae; audistis grande mysterium. Interroga hominem: christianus es? Respondit tibi: non sum, si paganus est aut iudaeus. Si autem dixerit: sum; adhuc quaeris ab eo: catechumenus, an fidelis? Si responderit: catechumenus, inunctus est, nondum lotus. Sed unde inunctus? Quaere, et respondet; quaere ab illo in quem credat; eo ipso quo catechumenus est, dicit: in christum. Ecce modo loquor et fidelibus et catechumenis. Quid dixi de sputo et luto? Quia verbum caro factum est. Hoc et catechumeni audiunt; sed non eis sufficit ad quod inuncti sunt; festinent ad lavacrum, si lumen inquirunt*" (Willems, CCSL 36 (1954), 382).

related to the yearly process of inviting catechumens at Lent in a liturgical context, further show the importance of catechumens for community dynamics, as they are employed to renew the commitment of the community.

### 1.2 *The Necessity of Repentance and Baptism*

All the other sermons of Augustine containing calls to catechumens, however, do not contain evidence about the liturgical setting. Again, a number of them are preached in polemics over repentance and baptism. This evidence goes beyond liturgical custom and suggests that Augustine was concerned with the initiation of catechumens because of their peculiar position in the community. A number of calls depend on the specific reading of the day, as was the case for the sermons on John 9. Augustine often argued under the authority of biblical passages whenever an opportunity arose, but he could also choose appropriate passages to quote and comment on, particularly since readings were not systematically set.<sup>36</sup> In an uncertainly dated sermon, the quotation of Melchisedec in Psalm 109, 4 brings Augustine, who interprets the psalm mainly as a description of the priesthood of Christ incarnate—a meaning hidden to the uninitiated—to exhort catechumens to abandon sluggishness and seek baptism to understand the mysteries and receive the Eucharist.<sup>37</sup> Further invitations relate to specific occasions in which Augustine dealt with catechumens and their potential baptism. Thus, in Sermon 260C, preached on Octave Sunday in Hippo, the final day of initiation for the newly baptised candidates (*neophyti*), Augustine included a call to the *catechumeni*, thus those who failed to prepare for baptism that year: “Let the catechumens (*catechumeni*) as well, whom mother Church has already conceived by some sort of sacrament (*sacramento*), agitate her womb with their desire for the new light, and hasten to be born and made perfect”.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine had barely finished the initiation of his yearly cohort as he already asked those who were still *catechumeni* to hurry to baptism. Earlier in the ser-

36 On readings see Margoni-Kögler (2010).

37 Augustine, *In Ps. 109*, 17: “*Si quid non intellegunt catechumeni, auferant pigritiam, festinent ad notitiam. Non ergo opus est mysteria promere; scripturae vobis intiment quid est sacerdotium secundum ordinem Melchisedec*”. See more discussion on this in Hombert, *BA* 66 (2013), 433–436. There is no clear evidence to date the sermon; it was situated in Hippo and dated to 412 or 414 during Lent by Zarb (1948), 189, 231–233, but recently Hombert, *BA* 66 (2013), 86–88 suggests 417–418 on the ground of parallels with *Ciu*.

38 Augustine, *S. 260C* (= Mai 94), 1: “*Simul ut etiam catechumeni, quos iam nonnullo sacramento mater concepit ecclesia, desiderio novae lucis urgeant eius viscera, et perfici nascique festinent*” (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 334; Hill, *WSA* 111/7 (1993), 194–195). The year of preaching is uncertain, see hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 176.

mon, Augustine had reminded that God and the Church were the parents of newly baptised candidates.<sup>39</sup> The *catechumeni* are exhorted on the basis of their affinity with the newly baptised, as they are also conceived in the womb of the same mother, to reach the same status as the *neophyti*. A further remarkable example is provided by Augustine's already evoked short exhortation, published by Dolbeau, on the topic of the burial of catechumens. Enforcing the separation of the faithful and of the catechumens in matters of burial, the bishop makes of the death of the young catechumen an occasion to preach to catechumens in the audience, insisting on the uncertainty of life and of the necessity of baptism to enter the kingdom of Heaven.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of bringing catechumens to baptism appears even more clearly in a number of sermons which focus on polemics over the necessity of repentance before baptism with the same arguments that are developed in the *De fide et operibus*.<sup>41</sup> In the explanation of Psalm 80, preached towards the end of 403 in Carthage,<sup>42</sup> the invitation to catechumens follows the typology of the crossing of the Red Sea. It mentions many of the usual arguments of Augustine's invitations: the catechumens' lack of knowledge and experience, their hesitations and their fears about baptism, quoting Jesus' invitation in Mt 11, 28.<sup>43</sup> The sermon however particularly insists on the necessity of repentance for catechumens before baptism, and at the same time reacts against the belief that receiving baptism would be enough to enter the kingdom of Heaven after purification through fire, on the basis of an interpretation of 1 Cor 3, 10–15.<sup>44</sup> Sermon 352A, probably preached in Carthage, perhaps in 413, similarly argues against catechumens who refuse to repent before baptism.<sup>45</sup> Starting from Mk 1, 15 (*"Quoniam impleta sunt tempora et appropinquavit regnum Dei, paenitemini et credite in Evangelium"*), Augustine notes that this applies not only to pagans

39 Augustine, S. 260C (= Mai 94), 1.

40 Augustine, S. 142aug, *post tractatum* (= Dolbeau 7), see Chapter 2, pp. 134–135. There are other examples of such occasional calls outside Lent: Augustine, S. 198aug, 12 and S. 374aug, 19 both referring to the secret covering the liturgical actions after the dismissal of catechumens to exhort them to be baptised.

41 For a more detailed discussion on these sermons in relation to the treatise and the polemics over pre-baptismal rules of behaviour see Pignot (2018), esp. 101–107.

42 For the dating see Hombert (2000), 563–588, esp. 578–579 and other hypotheses in Müller (2001), 828.

43 Augustine, *In Ps.* 80, 8–11.

44 Augustine, *In Ps.* 80, 20. In S. 16A (= Denis 20), 6, Augustine similarly recalls the forgiveness offered by baptism but reminds catechumens that God is not only good but also just and will judge sinners.

45 Hombert (2000), 463–464. It may have been preached during Lent, although this remains uncertain.

and Jews but to the catechumens in the audience as well, already conceived but not yet born.<sup>46</sup> He imagines a fictive dialogue with a catechumen who refuses to repent:

A catechumen can answer me, “Why say *repent* (Mk 1, 15) to us? First let me become one of the faithful, and perhaps I shall live a good life, and I won’t have to be a penitent.” My answer to that is, “In order to join the faithful, *repent*”. Those who come to baptism, after all, come by way of repentance. I mean, unless they condemn their old way of life by repenting, they won’t come to the new life by being enrolled for baptism.<sup>47</sup>

While Augustine does not openly call to baptism, he highlights the moral requirements of this transition, here particularly the need for penance, and implies that catechumens may have been reluctant to undergo pre-baptismal penance. Later in the sermon, Augustine more broadly evokes and rejects reasons why catechumens and the baptised alike might be reluctant to undergo penance: they may wish to keep their way of life and be confident that they can postpone penance, or on the contrary they may see little value in it.<sup>48</sup>

In other occasions Augustine further discusses the second case: catechumens who already follow strict discipline and do not see the added value of penance and baptism. Preaching on the reasons why Jesus needed to be baptised as narrated in the Gospel of John in two sermons of uncertain dating, but most probably to be situated outside Lent, respectively a month before Lent probably in December–January and after Easter week—part of the same series as *Io. eu. tr.* 10–11–12, preached perhaps in 406–407<sup>49</sup>—Augustine portrays these catechumens in a fictive dialogue, noting that they consider themselves better than the married faithful (*fideles*) and therefore scorn baptism.<sup>50</sup>

46 Augustine, *S.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 2–3. On the womb imagery, for instance also *S.* 56, 4,5; 65A (= Étaix 1), 7; 359, 4; *In Ps.* 57, 5; *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 2.

47 Augustine, *S.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 4: “*Catechumenus respondet mihi: ‘quare nobis dicis: paenitemini (Mk 1, 15)? Prius sim fidelis, et forte bene vivam, et paenitens non ero.’ Respondeo talibus: ut sitis fideles, paenitemini. Nam venientes ad baptismum per paenitentiam veniunt. Nisi enim paenitendo damnent veterem vitam, non competendo venient ad novam vitam*” (Dolbeau (2009), 109; Hill, *WSA* 111/11 (1997), 89 adapted).

48 Augustine, *S.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 7–8.

49 See Chapter 4, 2, pp. 184–187 for a discussion of their dating.

50 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 4, 13; the same theme is recalled in *Io. eu. tr.* 13, 6 with reference to the previous sermon. Another related discussion of Jesus’ baptism, which does not mention catechumens is found in *Io. eu. tr.* 5, 3. The precise dating of single sermons remains uncertain, however *Io. eu. tr.* 4 and 5 are early in the series, perhaps preached towards the

Augustine however requires them to follow Jesus' example and explains that baptism is essential. The same theme appears in a sermon on Psalm 90, perhaps belonging to the same series:

Now and then some catechumen emerges who is perhaps superior to many of the faithful in knowledge of the faith and personal conduct. He observes that many of the baptised are poorly instructed, and that many of them do not live as he does himself, with impressive self-control and chastity. He does not so much as seek a wife, yet he sees a believer, if not actually committing fornication, at least intemperate in relations with his wife. Such a catechumen may proudly toss his head and say, "Why do I need baptism? Why should I try to get what that fellow has, when I am already more advanced than he is in my way of life and learning?"<sup>51</sup>

All these sermons preached in a context of anti-Donatist polemics recall the explanation of the necessity of baptism found in the *De baptismo*, composed earlier, around 404–405, in which Augustine stated that, although good catechumens are to be preferred over bad baptised Christians, the first need baptism and the second repentance to enter the kingdom of Heaven.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Augustine, perhaps particularly in 406–407, rebuked reluctant catechumens in the Donatist polemics both to persuade them to enter initiation in his community and to reassert his wider principles on baptism. These catechumens may also point to groups of monks-catechumens as suggested by Harmless, who might have been reluctant to seek baptism.<sup>53</sup> Another possibility is that Augustine may also be influenced here by his anti-Manichaean views, since Manichaeans left open the possibility, as described in the *Kephalaia*, for perfect catechumens in their community to obtain salvation through good deeds

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end of December and the beginning of January, while *Io. eu. Tr.* 13 is preached after Easter perhaps close to the Ascension according to La Bonnardière (1965), 46–53.

51 Augustine, *In Ps.* 90 11, 6: "*Exsistit enim aliquando aliquis catechumenus qui forte doctrina et moribus vincit multos fideles; adtendit iam baptizatos multos imperitos, et multos non sic viventes quomodo ipse vivit, non in tanta continentia, non in tanta castitate; iam ille nec uxorem quaerit, et videt aliquando fidelem, si non fornicantem tamen uxore intemperantius utentem; potest erigere cervicem superbiae, et dicere: 'quid mihi iam opus est baptizari, ut hoc accipiam quod iste habet, quem iam et vita et doctrina praecedo?'*" (Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 39 (1956), 1271; Boulding, *WSA* 111/18 (2002), 336). The sermon follows *In Ps.* 90 1 of the preceding day; it is briefly analysed by Busch (1938), 428–429. For the possible links to the series see Rondet, H., 'Essais sur la chronologie des 'Enarrationes in Psalmos' de saint Augustin', *BLE* 77 (1976), 99–118, at 99–101.

52 Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 21.28. See Chapter 2 note 65.

53 Harmless (2014), 273–275 with references.

without requiring to be initiated as elects.<sup>54</sup> Either pointing to the reluctance of “sinful” or “ascetic” catechumens, Augustine’s sermons show that he could have been faced with alternative trends of resistance, but consistently taught the necessity of baptism and saw the integration of catechumens as an essential task to bring further unity to the community in a context of division.<sup>55</sup>

### 1.3 Conclusion

In his study of the already mentioned short exhortation of Augustine about the death of a young catechumen, strictly enforcing boundaries between catechumens and the baptised concerning the Eucharist even after death,<sup>56</sup> Rebillard concluded that it pertained to an isolated situation: the calls to baptism in this sermon would not be evidence for a widespread behaviour of postponing baptism until death amongst catechumens.<sup>57</sup> While Augustine’s sermons cannot be used as evidence to suggest that there were crowds of indifferent catechumens, nominal Christians, indefinitely postponing baptism, this investigation has shown, however, that for Augustine catechumens still constituted a body of Christians in his community that he viewed as problematic, notably in the context of rival communities. Augustine would often be concerned to address them in preaching in order to bring them to baptism, be it, as is most often the case, in a specific liturgical context, at the right time of the year, or at any other opportune time. The main themes found in the regular Lenten calls to catechumens appear also in Augustine’s preaching on other occasions when catechumens are in the audience.

Despite the fact that all the evidence comes from Augustine himself, who strove to demonstrate the necessity of the catechumens’ inclusion by stressing the paradox of their incomplete Christian membership, there is no reason to dismiss Augustine’s presentation and the catechumens’ contrasting views as a rhetorical construct. While Augustine wished to impose baptism as a necessity for any Christian, the interactions with catechumens in preaching, as Christians taking an active part in the community but still preferring a distant belonging, reflect their concrete liminal position within Christian communities and

54 See *Kephalaia* XCI: “These things that [...] were proclaimed about these perfect catechumens who shall be released from this one body and go to the heights. They are like the elect in their constitution. This is the sign of those catechumens who shall not enter (another) body” (Böhlig (1940), 229; Gardner (1995), 237).

55 This dichotomy is briefly mentioned in Rebillard (1998a), 289–291; Gavrilyuk (2007), 290–291.

56 Augustine, *S. 142aug. post tractatum* (= Dolbeau 7).

57 Rebillard (1998a), 291.

integrates the expectations of Augustine's audience. To emphasise their partial integration, Augustine employed a variegated imagery conveying a sense of incomplete transformation: catechumens are slaves, ill, and blind. In all three cases, they are not merely abandoned, terminally ill or hopelessly blind human beings. They are recruited as slaves in the house of God, thus contemplating the possibility of being freed and recognised by the *pater familias*; their illness has been diagnosed by God who opens the door for recovery; Jesus, as in the Gospel story, has covered their eyes with mud to heal them: they will see if they wash themselves. Augustine expected candidates to complete a full transformation process. As already hinted in a number of sermons previously discussed, a further remarkable analogy, often found in a polemical context, is that of the catechumens as babies conceived in the womb but not yet born, part of a wider theme, very common in the early Church, particularly in Africa: the Church is identified as the mother and Christians as her sons.<sup>58</sup> Thus, catechumens are said to be transformed and given birth through their mother, the Church, and their father, God.<sup>59</sup> Augustine distinguishes conception from birth and thus catechumens from the baptised, who have become sons of God through baptism.<sup>60</sup> The time between conception and birth, the catechumenate, is particularly delicate and requires special attention of the preacher to prevent miscarriage.<sup>61</sup> Finally, when birth is given, it can happen only once.<sup>62</sup>

The polemical context that is evident in a number of these sermons shows that the Catholic clergy fought over the initiation of catechumens in the Donatist schism, and that different views on the theological basis of initiation practices triggered intense debate, particularly perhaps around 406–407 against Donatists, and in polemics over the pre-baptismal discipline and the need of repentance. Augustine dedicated significant energy to catechise catechumens in order to avoid them passing to the Donatists. He also insisted on strict pre-

58 See, on the catechumenate: Dujarier, M., (1962), 'Le catéchuménat et la maternité de l'Église', *LMD* 71 (1962), 78–93. More broadly: Lamirande, E., (2001), 'Ecclesia', *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 687–720, esp. 703–705; Dassmann, E., (2004), 'Kirche 11 (bildersprachlich)', *RAC* 20, 966–1022, at 984–988; Jensen, R.M., (2008), 'Mater ecclesia and Fons aeterna: The Church and her Womb in Ancient Christian tradition', in Levine, A.-J., (2008), *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature* (London), 137–155; Peper, B.M., (2011) *The Development of Mater Ecclesia in North African Ecclesiology* (Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN, PhD Thesis).

59 Augustine, S. 65A (= Étaix 1), 7, uncertainly dated (for recent hypotheses of dating see Hill, *WSA* 111/3 (1991), 206 who suggests 397–398 and Hombert (2000) 437 and n. 8 who prefers 406–407).

60 Augustine, S. 56, 4.5 (undated); Augustine, *C. Iul.* vi, 16.49.

61 Augustine, *In Ps.* 57, 5 (August 403 in Carthage, see Müller (2001), 816 and 828).

62 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 2; S. 359, 4 (generally dated around 411–412 probably in Hippo Diarrhytus, see Verbraken (1976), 149); *S. Caes. eccl.* 5.

baptismal discipline and the necessity of baptism, reflecting the theological ideas he wanted to impart both to the candidates and to the baptised Christians who accompanied them. In a number of later sermons on John, Augustine evokes this need for the baptised and the catechumens to be imbued with knowledge about the “right” faith and to be made ready for the refutation of rival heresies.<sup>63</sup> The transition to baptism, actively recommended by Augustine, was, every year, a crucial matter to create solid bonds within his community. For catechumens, it was a complex choice. Their fears concentrated on the need to undergo examinations of conduct prior to baptism and the harshness of penance. Others could still fail to see any added value in baptism, as they were already integrated into the Christian community. Divisions within “Christianities” in late Roman Africa, further made the choice difficult. Seeking baptism in a given community was a strong statement. Augustine’s activity as a preacher was precisely meant to persuade catechumens of the necessity of baptism, in a context of division; he had to face the catechumens’ widespread attitude of progressive and prudent adhesion to Christianity.

## 2 Writing to Catechumens<sup>64</sup>

Beyond the words of the preacher in dialogue with his audience in the church, Augustine’s letters to catechumens offer an alternative and particularly informative way of understanding how the transition to baptism was negotiated. Indeed, these letters convey the views of Augustine and his influential aristocratic friends and, through them, of keen readers of their correspondence. While there are no letters preserved written by catechumens to Augustine, three letters sent to the catechumens Marcianus (*Ep.* 258), Caecilianus (*Ep.* 151), and Firmus (*Ep.* 2\*) still let the voices of these catechumens emerge, even quoting lost letters in the case of Firmus. These letters make it possible to get a better sense of Augustine’s dialogue with catechumens, showing that initiation was a debated process.

63 See for instance Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 36, 2–4, 6, 9, 13 and *Io. eu. tr.* 96, 3–5 (Augustine explains that catechumens hear and are able to accept the revelations on Christ given after his ascension to heaven, contrary to pagans, Jews, Manichaeans, and heretics). For the dating, respectively around 414–415 and in the early 420s, see Chapter 2 note 139 and Berrouard, *BA* 74A (1993), 9–49 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 177–194.

64 This is an updated synthesis of a more detailed study: Pignot (2016).



## 2.1 *Friendship Requires Baptism: Marcianus and Caecilianus*

*Ep.* 258 cannot be precisely dated but it was most certainly written after 387, and probably after 391 when Augustine was ordained.<sup>65</sup> Marcianus, not attested otherwise, was presumably a well-educated friend of Augustine, maybe from the times of Thagaste, Carthage or Italy.<sup>66</sup> He was one of the main supporters of the young and ambitious Augustine, and the letter states that he had not shared Augustine's religious past—though it is unclear whether this means as a Manichaean, a Christian catechumen, or even both—nor had he adhered at first to Augustine's conversion to Catholic Christianity.<sup>67</sup> In his letter to Marcianus, Augustine employs friendship as a means to convince him to seek baptism: he argues that there can be no true friendship outside a shared full belonging to Christianity on the basis of Cicero's definition of friendship as a common agreement on things human and divine, already quoted in the *Contra academicos*.<sup>68</sup> It is clear that Marcianus was a catechumen: the address speaks of Marcianus as a "brother in Christ",<sup>69</sup> while Augustine explains in the letter that their friendship has now begun "because you, who once led with me a temporal life with a most pleasing good will, have now begun to live with me in the hope of eternal life".<sup>70</sup> However, he adds that for their friendship to be true and

65 Divjak, J., (2001), 'Epistulae', *AL* 2, fasc. 5/6, 893–1057, at 1017 n. 331 without giving precise reasons dated it between 387 and 395–396, but Perler-Maier (1969), 153–154 prefer 391, relating the conversation with Marcianus to Augustine's ordination, while Poque, S., (1987), 'Réflexions d'Augustin sur la conversion de son ami Marcianus (*Ep.* 258)', *Augustinianum* 27 (1987), 297–301, noticing that Augustine says he is very busy, tentatively suggested 412–413. See 'Marcianus 2', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 691–692 in favour of 395.

66 See 'Marcianus 14', *PLRE* 1 (1971), 555–556 asserting wrongly that the identification is unlikely because Marcianus had not been a Christian; also 'Marcianus 2', *PCBE*, 1, Paris, 1982, 691–692.

67 Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 1 and particularly 258, 2: "*Rerum quippe divinarum [...] socius mihi nondum eras, sive quando nec ipse in eis eram sive posteaquam ego eas utcumque sapere coepi, a quibus tu longe abhorrebas*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 607).

68 Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 1; Cicero, *Laelius* 6, 20; Augustine, *Acad.* 111, 6.13. On friendship in Augustine see in particular, among the numerous available studies: Hadot, I., (1986), 'Amicitia', *AL* 1, fasc. 1/2, 287–293 (esp. 288–289); McEvoy, J., (1986), "Anima una et cor unum": Friendship and Spiritual Unity in Augustine', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 53, 40–92; Bavel, T. van, (1987), 'The Influence of Cicero's Ideal of Friendship on Augustine', in Boeft, J. den, Oort, J. van, (eds.), (1987), *Augustiniana Traiectina. Communications présentées au Colloque International d'Utrecht, 13–14 novembre 1986* (Paris), 59–72; Pizzolato, L.F., (1993), *Agostino e l'essenza dell'amicizia cristiana* (Turin); Rebenich, S., (2012), 'Augustine on Friendship and Orthodoxy', in Vessey (2012), 365–374.

69 The address ("*Domino merito suscipiendo et in Christo dilectissimo ac desiderantissimo fratri Marciano*", Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 605) is repeated at the end of the letter (*Ep.* 258, 5).

70 Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 2: "*Quoniam qui mecum temporalem vitam quondam iucundissima*

everlasting (*vera ac sempiterna*), it has to be based on the shared observance of the two commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbour as oneself, something which is only possible if Marcianus receives baptism.<sup>71</sup> Augustine therefore ends his letter expecting Marcianus to enrol as a *competens* by giving his name to prepare for baptism and to inform him on his decision by writing.<sup>72</sup> The final part of the letter emphasises that Marcianus is ready: he is a fitting candidate, mature, of good moral conduct and, when they met, he quoted and seemed to have made Terence's saying his own: "Now this day brings new life and requires other conduct".<sup>73</sup> To this verse, Augustine adds a passage of Virgil's fourth Eclogue on the forgiveness of bad deeds that he also employs in letters to the pagans Nectarius and Volusianus and against Porphyry in the *De civitate Dei*, to show to Marcianus that he should start the preparation for baptism to be forgiven of his sins.<sup>74</sup>

This letter employs the same arguments found in the main exhortative works of Augustine like the *Confessiones*—as we will see—but in a concrete exchange with a *catechumenus*, maybe in such status since a good number of years. It matches the themes and core requirements set in Augustine's sermons: catechumens are Christian believers, who share Christ with the baptised but who need baptism for the forgiveness of sins. They are ready for baptism when their moral conduct has been tested and when maturity meets the desire for radical renewal. The general character and tone of the letter, which is strikingly impersonal, makes one wish to know more about its context of composition. It seems unlikely, as there is no evidence in the letter itself, that Augustine replied to a lost letter of Marcianus. Since the conversation that they shared on Terence cannot be precisely situated in correlation with the letter, it seems plausible to suggest that Augustine wrote it on his own initiative, making of his acquaintance with Marcianus an opportunity to appeal more broadly to well-educated aristocrats. Augustine puts forward a new definition of friendship and aims at creating a new circle of friends based on the sharing of Christian membership. This friendship, as the bonds between Christians in the community, is only in its first stages when they are catechumens and requires baptism to

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*benignitate duxisti, nunc in spe vitae aeternae mecum esse coepisti*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 606; Teske, R., *WSA* II/4 (2005), 195–196).

71 Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 4–5.

72 Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 5: "*Tu sumere rescripta desidero et te nomen vel dedisse inter competentes vel daturum esse iam iamque cognoscere*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 610).

73 Ibid.; Terence, *Andreas* 1, 2.

74 Virgil, *Eclogae* 4, 13–14. Augustine, *Ep.* 104, 3.11; *Ep.* 137, 3; *Ciu.* x, 27. On the Christian use of this passage see Courcelle, P., (1959), 'Les exégèses chrétiennes de la quatrième églogue', *REA* 59, 294–319.

become accomplished. The analogy between friendship and Christian membership well shows that baptism created stronger bonds that are precisely the reason why bringing catechumens to complete their initiation was essential.

The letter to Caecilianus, dated to late 413 or 414, has been well studied, as it discusses both the execution of Marcellinus, the friend and dedicatee of important works of Augustine like the *De civitate Dei*, and Augustine's decision to quickly leave Carthage after the death of his friend in September 413. Augustine skilfully offers to clear Caecilianus of complicity while wondering about his role on the day of the execution, implicitly requests his assistance in honouring the memory of Marcellinus and requires Caecilianus' baptism. It is significant that although Augustine spends most of the letter hinting at Caecilianus' complicity, he ends noting that what bothers him most is that Caecilianus is not yet baptised:

But, if you want to hear the truth, there is one thing that I find it hard to put up with in you, namely, that, though you are a man of some age and of such a life and goodness, you still want to be a catechumen, as if the faithful cannot more faithfully and better govern the state to the extent that they are more faithful and better.<sup>75</sup>

This paradox shows that Augustine saw baptism and penance as tools for a careful reconciliation, both accepting Caecilianus' innocence in the episode and suggesting him to receive baptism and thus be forgiven of his former sins. These details contain striking similarities with the letter to Marcianus—Caecilianus is a *catechumenus* of the right age and conduct who still refuses baptism—and an interesting addition: Caecilianus may refuse to receive it because of his position as a high ranking official, while Augustine insists that he would become a better administrator as a faithful in the Church. Caecilianus' reluctance may be related to the death of Marcellinus: Caecilianus would not want, as an official involved in the affair, to undergo penitential practices and baptism that could point to his guilt. This letter provides another interesting perspective on the reasons that might bring Augustine to exhort catechumens to baptism and underline its necessity. Undergoing the baptismal preparation, especially its set of moral requirements, catechesis and rituals of penance

75 Augustine, *Ep.* 151, 14: "*Unum est autem, si verum quaeris audire, quod in te molestissime fero, quod, cum sis et huius iam aetatis et huius vitae atque probitatis, adhuc vis esse catechumenus, quasi fideles non possint; quanto sint fideliores atque meliores, tanto fidelius ac melius administrare rem publicam*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 44 (1904), 392; Teske, *WSA* 11/2 (2003), 387 adapted).

together with other individuals of various backgrounds certainly sends a strong message to the Christian community and the local society, particularly in the case of prominent officials.

## 2.2 *Debating Baptism with Firmus*

The third catechumen correspondent of Augustine, Firmus, is the most interesting case. Firmus exchanged at least seven letters with the bishop in the late 420s, of which only two (*Ep.* 1A\* and 2\*) have been preserved.<sup>76</sup> In the first, dated to 426–427, Augustine depicts Firmus as an eager reader of the *De civitate Dei*. Augustine sends him the work in twenty two *quaterniones* (each covering a single book (*liber*) of the work), with recommendations on how he should bind them and spread the whole work, advising that he should give it to be copied by “the brothers in Carthage” and Firmus’ friends, both those who “want to be instructed among the Christian people” and those who “are trapped in some superstition”, most likely referring respectively to catechumens and pagans.<sup>77</sup> The second preserved letter, *Ep.* 2\* was probably written by Augustine in 427–428 as a late reply to three lost letters of the same Firmus: his correspondent wrote back replying to *Ep.* 1A\* and gave his views on the first ten books of the *De civitate Dei*, then he wrote again putting off sending a speech requested by Augustine and rejecting Augustine’s request that he be baptised, and finally he sent the requested speech.<sup>78</sup> This implies that Augustine already wrote a letter

76 See Divjak, J., *BA* 46B (1987), 7–32 and 424–429. *Ep.* 1A\* was already published in Lambot, C., (1939), ‘Lettre inédite de S. Augustin relative au “De civitate Dei”’, *RB* 51, 109–121.

77 Augustine, *Ep.* 1A\*, 2: “*Quos tamen nostri fratres ibi apud Carthaginem ad hoc opus pertinentes quod est de civitate dei nondum habent, rogo ut petentibus ad describendum dignanter libenterque concedas. Non enim multis dabis, sed vix uni vel duobus et ipsi iam ceteris dabunt; amicis vero tuis, sive in populo christiano se desiderent instrui, sive qualibet superstitione teneantur, unde videbuntur posse per hunc laborem nostrum dei gratia liberari, quomodo impertias ipse videris*” (Divjak, *BA* 46B (1987), 58; Teske, *WSA* 11/4 (2005), 231 adapted); this hypothesis is found in Divjak, J., (1977), ‘Augustins erster Brief an Firmus und die revidierte Ausgabe der *Civitas Dei*’, in Bannert, H., Divjak, J., (eds.), (1977), *Latinität und Alte Kirche. Festschrift für R. Hanslik zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna-Cologne-Graz), 56–70, at 67.

78 See Primmer, A., (1983), ‘Nachlese zur Textgestaltung der neugefundenen Augustinusbriefe’, in *Les lettres de saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak. Communications présentées au colloque des 20 et 21 Septembre 1982* (Paris), 43–82, at 46–57 for a detailed discussion of these lost letters and of some passages from *Ep.* 2\*. The precise dates of *Ep.* 1A\* and *Ep.* 2\* are uncertain: one must allow for some time between completion of *Ciu.* in 426, the writing of *Ep.* 1A\* and lost letters of Firmus, and the writing of *Ep.* 2\*. For this reason, Divjak suggested to broadly date *Ep.* 1A\* to 427 and *Ep.* 2\* to 428. See Divjak (1977), 60, followed without further argumentation by Fröhofen, H., (1984), ‘Anmerkungen zum Brief 2 des heiligen Augustinus’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 38/4, 385–392, at 390 n. 7; Braun, R., *BA* 46B (1987), 428; Marinova, E., “What Good are the Books”? Knowledge and Will in Augustine’s

in which he first asked for the speech and urged Firmus to be baptised. Thus, in *Ep.* 2\*, it is the second time that Augustine demands Firmus' baptism and it also refutes Firmus' arguments for staying a *catechumenus*. It provides a unique conversation between Augustine and a catechumen.

Firmus was certainly of high status, as the main addressees of the two letters ("*Domino eximio meritoque honorabili ac suscipiendo filio*" and "*Domino merito insigni sinceræ dilectionis affectu multum mihi honorando filio*") and the reference to Firmus as "*eximietas tua*" in the body of both letters suggest.<sup>79</sup> Before the discovery of *Ep.* 2\*, most scholars had suggested, wrongly, that he was the letter bearer and priest Firmus.<sup>80</sup> The letters to the catechumen Firmus however provide us with a tantalising glimpse into the role that catechumens could play in late antique Africa: Firmus read the *Contra academicos* of Augustine and he also spent three afternoons listening to the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei* being read, before requesting and spreading copies of the whole work in Carthage, most likely sharing it with his catechumen friends.<sup>81</sup> It is possible that these afternoon readings were intended for catechumens in Carthage, or, although less likely as it is not mentioned by Augustine, that Firmus became a catechumen after listening to the book.<sup>82</sup> The letters to Firmus show as well that the *De civitate Dei* was written and employed as a catechetical work by Augustine himself, bearing striking similarities in structure and content to the *De catechizandis rudibus*.<sup>83</sup> The eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei* that was read in Carthage, in particular, is easily compared to the *De catechizandis rudibus* and may be seen as a further example of Augustine's catechesis: indeed, it focuses on a recapitulation of the history of mankind from

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Letter to Firmus (*Ep.* 2\*), in Nehring, P., Stróżyński, M., Toczko, R., (eds.), (2017), *Scrinium Augustini. The World of Augustine's Letters. Proceedings of the International Workshop on Augustine's Correspondence, Toruń, 25–26 June 2015* (Turnhout), 225–248, at 227.

79 Augustine, *Ep.* 1A\*, 3; 2\*, 12. This is noted by Lepelley, C., (2001b), 'La crise de l'Afrique romaine au début du v<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après les lettres nouvellement découvertes de saint Augustin', in Lepelley, C., (2001a), *Aspects de l'Afrique romaine: Les cités, la vie rurale, le christianisme* (Bari), 357–375, at 362 n. 25 who highlights as well that the task of binding the *De civitate Dei* required wealth.

80 See "Firmus 4", *PCBE* 1 (1982), 460; he is not "Firmus 2" described at 458–559; also Divjak (1977), 64–66; Divjak, J., (2004), 'Firmus', *AL* 3, fasc. 1/2, 29–32.

81 Augustine, *Ep.* 1A\*, 3; *Ep.* 2\*, 3.

82 See Jo, J., (2013), 'Augustine's Three-Day Lecture in Carthage', *SP* 70, 331–337.

83 Augustine *Cat. rud.* On *De civitate Dei* as a protreptic work see Schäublin, C., (1984), 'Zwei Bemerkungen über Literatur in den neuen Augustin-Briefen', *Museum Helveticum* 41 (1984), 54–61, at 55–57; for its catechetical purpose more specifically, see van Oort (1991), 171–198; Oort, J. van, (1993), 'Augustine's Letters to Firmus (1A\* and 2\*) and the Purpose of the *De civitate Dei*', *SP* 27 (1993), 417–423.

the origins to the Incarnation, and discusses, amongst other things, the prophecies of Christ in the Scriptures and pagan works, the Scriptures in contrast to philosophers, and the mingling of the elect and reprobate in the Church.

All this further demonstrates the prominent role played by Augustine in the instruction of catechumens in Carthage, both sending works from Hippo, but also, during his travels to Carthage, regularly preaching sermons addressing catechumens and perhaps reading to them some of his catechetical works.<sup>84</sup> The fact that this was a two-way communication cannot be stressed enough: in the 420s, Firmus is the medium through which, after three afternoons of reading, Augustine is able to spread his *De civitate Dei* among the circles of Firmus' friends and—at the same time—to receive feedback.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, writing back to Firmus, Augustine was eager to know more about his views on the *De civitate Dei*. This nuances Augustine's depiction of catechumens as ignorant and distant members of the community, particularly in sermons calling for baptism, and it shows that curious and literate catechumens were not content with attending weekly preaching but could take part in more serious teaching and regular discussions on Christianity. Thus, catechumens were an expected audience of Augustine's works. However, they could also be in charge, like Firmus, of spreading Augustine's work and ideas and bringing pagans to Christianity. At least in the case of influential aristocrats, they were not merely passive but clearly active promoters of Christianity.<sup>86</sup>

Augustine's second letter is intended to bring Firmus to ask for baptism and thus consists in a refutation of Firmus' reasons for postponing baptism.<sup>87</sup> The refutation works as a dialogue in which Firmus' position emerges as distinctive:

84 Since it is known that Augustine organised a reading of *Ciu.* XVIII, other readings of various works may have taken place during his life, of which little to no evidence has been preserved.

85 On the circles of pagans in Carthage see Lepelley, C., (1979), *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine* 1 (Paris), 357–362; about the planning of *Ciu.* and the use of letters by Augustine: Clark, G., (2017), 'Letters and the City of God', in Nehring-Stróżyński-Toczko (2017), 181–202.

86 On Augustine's promotion of his works and book production, see Tornau, C., (2011), 'Text, Medium und publizistische Begleitung: Buchproduktion und Buchkomposition bei Augustinus', in Del Corso, L., Pecere, P., (eds.), (2011), *Il libro filosofico: dall'antichità al XXI secolo = Philosophy and the books* (Turnhout), 141–168.

87 Augustine's refutation is analysed in Catarinella, F.M., (2002), 'Confutazioni epistolari: il caso Firmus (Aug. Ep. 2\*) o della conversione differita', in Marin, M., Moreschini, C., (eds.), (2002), *Africa cristiana. Storia, religione, letteratura* (Brescia), 221–239, leaving however Firmus' status as a catechumen and its implications undiscussed. More consideration to this aspect is given in Fronhofen (1984), 386–387; Clark (2017), 193–195. Marinova (2017) provides a more detailed analysis of the letter focusing particularly on the relation between reading and salvation, and on Augustine's techniques of persuasion.

it shows, in parallel to sermons, what catechumens may have thought as they heard calls to baptism. Firmus gave three main reasons for his wish to stay a *catechumenus*: the need to be strengthened before carrying the burden of baptism, the benefits from learning slowly about religion, and the need to wait for a sign from God.<sup>88</sup> Augustine's letter refutes the three reasons successively and argues in favour of baptism, showing that for him and many bishops of his generation, baptism had to swiftly follow, especially for eager, well-informed and wealthy Christians like Firmus. His letter is a manifesto against the attitude of prudent adherence to Christianity, in favour of a much more clear-cut identity, making use of rich array of arguments. The letter includes the usual rhetoric found in Augustine's calls to baptism as highlighted both in other letters and sermons more generally: the uncertainty of death, the burden of sin, the Devil's counsel, and a set of biblical quotations and classical references are put together to over-run Firmus' position.<sup>89</sup> However, it also employs other remarkable devices: the bishop opposes Firmus and other men's reluctance to the many women who have accepted baptism, among whom Firmus' wife.<sup>90</sup> Resorting to womanly influence in his discussion of Firmus' decision making, Augustine provides a powerful shaming argument. Augustine particularly opposes Firmus' greater knowledge about Christianity, acquired through reading, with his wife's ritual experience that remains inaccessible to him.<sup>91</sup> By doing so, Augustine both highlights the opportunity that is provided by Firmus' marriage and exacer-

88 Firmus in Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 4: "*At enim tanti ponderis sarcina non potest infirmis adhuc et non corroboratis viribus sustineri*" (first reason); 2\*, 6: "*Et religioni, inquis, hac tarditate proficitur. Nam maiorem fidei reverentiam pollicetur qui in augusta sacri mysterii secreta venturus ad remotiora cunctanter accedit*" (second reason); 2, 7 "*In his rebus eius maxime expectanda voluntas est, cuius in appetitus omnes voluntate compellimur*" (third reason) (Divjak, *BA* 46B (1987), 64, 68, 72).

89 Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 3–11.

90 Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 4: "*Nec attenditis, o viri quicumque istam sarcinam formidatis, facillime in ea portanda vos a feminis vinci, quarum fidelium atque castarum religiosa multitudo fructifera fecundat ecclesia. [...] Non enim metuo ne te offendam, cum exemplo feminae civitatem dei te exhortor intrare: nam si res est difficilis, iam ibi est sexus infirmior, si autem facilis, nulla causa est, ut non ibi sit fortior.*" (Divjak, *BA* 46B (1987), 64). On this rhetoric: Cooper, K., (1992), 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence: an Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy', *JRS* 82, 150–164, esp. 160–161. For some epigraphical sources: Lepelley (1979), 361.

91 Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 4: "*Nam credo, quod etiam quamquam fideli catechumenus insinues tamen aliqua ad religionem pertinentia quae legisti et ipsa non legit; quae autem scit illa et adhuc nescis tibi non potest pandere*" (Divjak, *BA* 46B (1987), 66). Marinova (2017), 229–230 notes that Firmus may correspond to the profile of learned candidates entering the catechumenate outlined in *Cat. rud.*—although he is already a catechumen.

bates the negative effects of Firmus' postponement, which would prevent the spouses from sharing their religious experience. Augustine also particularly concentrates on refuting Firmus' third reason—the need to wait for a sign of God's will—bearing themes that well relate to the anti-Pelagian polemics in which he is deeply involved at the time.<sup>92</sup> The answer to Firmus becomes a general statement against what he saw as misconceptions on human free will—a topic which, as suggested by Marinova, particularly concerns Augustine in this letter, and understandably so in the context of late anti-Pelagian polemics.<sup>93</sup>

The letter is employed as a medium to share views on the necessity of baptism to any potential reader, particularly underlining the incompatibility of knowing Christianity well, having familiarity with Augustine's work, and refusing baptism.<sup>94</sup> It draws sharp lines against Firmus' blurring attitude. The opposition between spouses, between learning and experiencing religion, is striking and reveals the stakes of the debate: learned unbaptised Christians put into question the significance of ritual barriers for the definition of Christian membership.

Firmus' letter is one of the rare and illuminating instances in which catechumens are allowed a say in late antique sources. Firmus, unlike Augustine, does not provide an elaborated theological view centred on the necessity of baptism. He understands his belonging to Christianity in a broader sense and sees the catechumenate as a fitting time for progressively strengthening his commitment through learning; he takes the step of baptism most seriously and approaches religion, and its mysteries, with awe. He waits for the right time, which should come as the result of some peculiar event in his life. Since Augustine mentions in his letter that Firmus is held back by concupiscence not to seek baptism, it seems that Firmus' choice not to be baptised might also more concretely be related to some specific requirements of the baptismal preparation, such as the rejection of concubines, or point to the perceived incompatibility of baptism with one's professional ambitions.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Firmus' point of view provides a key to understanding conversion to Christianity at Augustine's time: the transition to baptism and full integration was a slow process in which both candidates and churches monitored each other in a gradual and careful manner. Firmus' profile in a sense corresponds to those catechu-

92 Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 7–8.

93 Marinova (2017), 232.

94 For the significance of this opposition between knowledge and action to understand the letter, see Marinova (2017), esp. 244–248.

95 Augustine, *Ep.* 2\*, 11: “*Caritas enim qua es id facturus ex deo est, concupiscentia vero, qua id ut nondum facias detineris non est ex deo*” (Divjak, *BA* 46B (1987), 86).



mens mentioned in Augustine's sermons who greatly value baptism as a life-changing ritual and wait to be ready to take a radical commitment.

Entering the baptismal preparation was a decision which affected the whole household and the religious community and had an impact on how individuals situated themselves within the community. Augustine's denial of friendship to Marcianus, his rebukes to Caecilianus after the Marcellinus affair and his questioning of Firmus' ability to understand the *De civitate Dei* are all related to baptism as a marker which creates new bonds, new status and new understanding. At the same time, for these catechumens, their relationship with Augustine, other Christians, the Church, and God, could be carried on as catechumens and lead them progressively to a greater understanding and practice of Christianity. Augustine's negotiation of baptism sheds light on the peculiar position of catechumens in Christian communities and on his attempt to integrate them more fully. The cases of Marcianus, Caecilianus and Firmus show that well-educated and high-rank catechumens provided an essential audience for Augustine: on the one hand, they brought him to assert the imperfection of their status as catechumens; on the other hand, he saw them as a prominent group in the process of Christianisation of North Africa, as they provided a much-needed link to the wider circles of catechumens and pagans and were a medium through which Augustine's ideas could spread beyond the church.

### 3 Narratives of Baptism in Augustine's Works

The matters discussed in sermons rebuking catechumens in the church and in elaborate letters to aristocrats, were also more broadly an important concern of Augustine's treatises, which offer another complementary way to contextualise and understand better the negotiation of baptism in Augustine's pastoral care. In his works, Augustine provided readers—who undoubtedly included catechumens, like Firmus—with accessible narratives shedding light on the dynamics that should trigger the decision to take the step. Four main works are considered here: *Confessiones*, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, *De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus* and *De civitate Dei* (book XXII). Besides the *De fide et operibus*, which provides a specific polemical discussion on the necessity of pre-baptismal penance and rules of behaviour,<sup>96</sup> the *Confessiones* are the only early structured discussion on the transition to baptism and its postponement, written by the newly appointed bishop as an overview of his own conver-

96 See a detailed study in Pignot (2018) and discussion in the next chapter, pp. 191–196.

sion and its value and use for others.<sup>97</sup> The three other works were written between 421 and 426–427, thus in Augustine's last years. I first explore the early general statements in the *Confessiones*—excluding what pertains only to Augustine's own experience, already discussed in Chapter 1—before concentrating on Augustine's later views in the three above-mentioned works, and show the contribution of works, compared to sermons and letters, to understand Augustine's uneasiness with the peculiar status of catechumens and his repeated efforts to bring them to baptism.

### 3.1 *The Confessiones*

In the first book of the *Confessiones*, in a famous passage, after narrating his initiation as a catechumen, Augustine sharply criticises his mother's decision to postpone his baptism after he was about to receive it in emergency during an illness. The bishop's voice speaks aloud in commenting on the episode in more general terms:

Even now gossips speaking about one or another person can be heard on all sides saying in our ears: 'Let him be, let him do it; he is not yet baptised.' Yet in regard to bodily health we do not say: 'Let him inflict more wounds on himself, for he is not yet cured.' How much better for me if I had been quickly healed and if, thanks to the diligent care of my family and my own decisions, action had been taken by which I received the health of my soul and was kept safe under the protection which you would have given me (cf. Ps 34, 3). Certainly much better. But beyond boyhood many great waves of temptations were seen to be threatening. My mother was already well aware of that, and her plan was to commit to the waves the clay out of which I would later be shaped rather than the actual image itself.<sup>98</sup>

97 I do not consider here broad theological discussions on baptism, particularly in terms of its validity and necessity in the Donatist and Pelagian controversies as these do not bear upon the catechumenate itself.

98 Augustine, *Conf.* I, 11.18: "*Unde ergo etiam nunc de aliis atque aliis sonat undique in auribus nostris: sine illum, faciat; nondum enim baptizatus est. Et tamen in salute corporis non dicimus: sine vulneretur amplius; nondum enim sanatus est. Quanto ergo melius et cito sanarer et id ageretur mecum meorum meaque diligentia, ut recepta salus animae meae tuta esset tutela tua, qui dedisses eam. melius vero. Sed quot et quanti fluctus impendere temptationum post pueritiam videbantur, noverat eos iam illa mater et terram per eos, unde postea formarer, quam ipsam iam effigiem committere volebat*". (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 10; Chadwick (1991), 14).

This early view on postponement is comparable to the sermons previously explored arguing that it is worse to postpone baptism because of the fear of sin and thus carry past sins, than be cleansed from past sins and start anew. It also states Augustine's view, similarly found and rejected in sermons, according to which catechumens would be in a better position to avoid the strict Church discipline that he attempts to implement. Thus, Augustine emphasises the importance of baptism as a way to go beyond the uncertainties of the catechumenate. This comment is probably made in light of his own troubled experience but it also reflects Augustine's stress on baptism, with the interesting opposition of the clay, covering the catechumen, and the actual image, revealed after baptism, well recalling his sermons on the man born blind. Furthermore, in book II, Augustine also criticises his parents' (and particularly Monnica's) decision to postpone his marriage to promote his studies and social mobility.<sup>99</sup> The bishop criticises the postponements of baptism and marriage as missed opportunities of his youth, implying a connection between them. This connection is even more explicit in book VI, where Augustine gives clues about Monnica's plans and states that she finally expected him to get married and be baptised.<sup>100</sup>

These passages show that, as for marriage, the household may have had a prominent role in the decision to seek baptism, and that marital status would have played a central part of the decision process, thus recalling Augustine's discussion with Firmus. Monnica's decision to postpone Augustine's baptism is presented by the bishop as a consequence of the prospect of his beginning adolescence and the first relationships he might experience, as much as her hope that he will be baptised are linked to the security of marriage. These views are in fact also those of Augustine: as we shall see in the next chapter, for Augustine, the examination taking place at the entrance into the baptismal preparation should particularly focus on behaviour and especially marital status and relationships with concubines—this is a main concern of the *De fide et operibus*. The link between baptismal preparation and marriage—despite

99 Augustine, *Conf.* II, 2.4: "*Non fuit cura meorum ruentem excipere me matrimonio, sed cura fuit tantum, ut discerem sermonem facere quam optimum et persuadere dictione*"; II, 3.8: "*Non enim et illa, [...] mater carnis meae, sicut monuit me pudicitiam, ita curavit quod de me a viro suo audierat, iamque pestilentiosum et in posterum periculosum sentiebat, cohercere termino coniugalibus affectus, si resecari ad vivum non poterat; non curavit hoc, quia metus erat, ne impediretur spes mea compede uxoria, non spes illa, quam in te futuri saeculi habebat mater, sed spes litterarum, quas ut nossem nimis volebat parens uterque*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 19 and 21). See: Cooper, K., (2012), 'Love and Belonging, Loss and Betrayal in the *Confessions*', in Vessey (2012), 69–86.

100 Augustine, *Conf.* VI, 13.23.

the fact that Augustine himself made a different choice—provides an interesting clue on the dynamics of conversion and baptism in Augustine's Africa.

Besides Augustine's conversion, the *Confessiones* include another already discussed exemplary story against the postponement of baptism advocating for the ritual integration of distant but learned Christians: Marius Victorinus' conversion narrated to Augustine by the priest Simplicianus during his stay in Milan and referring back to events in Rome in the 350s.<sup>101</sup> Victorinus, a keen reader of the Scriptures and of every available Christian text, states to Simplicianus that he is secretly a Christian. Simplicianus, however, asks him to show a decisive commitment by openly entering the *ecclesia*.<sup>102</sup> The episode describes both Victorinus' status—a man imbued with Christian learning but failing to integrate in terms of rituals—and his reasons for postponing and for finally adhering to the Church in Rome: he at first fails to understand what Simplicianus means by entering the *ecclesia*, thinking of the material building and jokes: "Do walls make Christians?".<sup>103</sup> After some time, however, Victorinus finally understands that being in the *ecclesia* means to enter its community through ritual initiation, without feeling shame because of his pagan friends.<sup>104</sup> Although not strictly describing the transition from the catechumenate to baptism, this narrative, besides its significance as an *exemplum* triggering Augustine's own conversion, still conveys much of the bishop's more general views already highlighted in sermons and letters on the challenges of seeking baptism, particularly for well-learned individuals: the opposition of secret and public revelation, the contrast between going to church and really becoming member of the community through ritual preparation, the shortfall of only adhering intellectually to Christianity through reading, the painful change of social ties, the fear of the final judgment.<sup>105</sup>

101 See Chapter 1, pp. 67–69, with note 131 for references.

102 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.3–4.

103 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.4: "Ergo parietes faciunt christianos?" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 115).

104 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.4: "Sed posteaquam legendo et inhiando hausit firmitatem timuitque negari a Christo coram angelis sanctis, si eum timeret coram hominibus confiteri, reusque sibi magni criminis apparuit erubescendo de sacramentis humilitatis verbi tui et non erubescendo de sacris sacrilegis superbiorum daemoniorum, quae imitator superbus acceperat, depudit vanitati et erubuit veritati subitoque et inopinatus ait Simpliciano, ut ipse narrabat: eamus in ecclesiam: christianus volo fieri" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 115–116).

105 For more on the significance of *exempla* in *Conf.* see Ayres, L., (2009), 'Into the Poem of the Universe. *Exempla*, Conversion, and Church in Augustine's *Confessiones*', *ZAC* 13/2 (2009), 263–281.

### 3.2 *Baptism, Dreams and Miracles in Augustine's Later Works*

Twenty years or more later, between 421 and 426–427, Augustine again discusses the transition to baptism in exemplary stories promoting swift baptism, however in an evolving perspective in which extraordinary events take the frontstage, in the aftermath of the arrival of relics of Saint Stephen and the miracles that they performed.<sup>106</sup> This taste for the unconventional as a sign of God's will and power was shared by many at his time.<sup>107</sup> Dreams and miracles were mentioned as major motives for conversion among newcomers in the *De catechizandis rudibus*, Augustine contrasting them with the use of Scripture.<sup>108</sup> In these later works, however, the bishop exploits extraordinary narratives as the basis to convince others about the necessity and power of baptism. This evolution also shows the significance of these motives, Augustine progressively taking them more positively into account. A remarkable example of such narratives is found in the *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, presumably written between spring 421 and the end of 423, in which Augustine discusses how the *curalis pauper* Curma's decision to seek baptism was triggered by a vision.<sup>109</sup> The episode is told as the work—intended to answer Paulinus' question about the death of Flora's son concerning the usefulness of burying bodies at Felix' shrine and of praying for the dead—comes to discuss visions of the dead leading to the discovery of bodies, the creation of shrines and the burial *ad sanctos*. Augustine is sceptical: he tells Curma's story to demonstrate that the dead cannot communicate with the living and consequently cannot preside over burial practices,

106 The more frequent reference to miracles in Augustine's later life after the introduction of the cult of Stephen has been often noted, see for instance Lancel (1999b), 332–335 and 648–658; Brown (2000), 417–422; Leyser, C., (2005), 'Homo pauper, de pauperibus natus: Augustine, Church Property, and the Cult of Stephen', *AS* 36, 229–237; Lancel, S., (2006), 'Saint Augustin et le miracle', in Meyers, J., (ed.), (2006), *Les miracles de saint Étienne. Recherches sur le recueil pseudo-augustinien (BHL 7860–7861) avec édition critique, traduction et commentaire* (Turnhout), 69–77; Roessli, J.-M., (2012), 'Mirabilia, miraculum', *AL* 3, 7/8 (2012), 25–29; Brown (2015), 57–65. On the cult of Stephen in Africa at this period in general see Meyers (2006), esp. 11–130.

107 See Brown (2000), 416; Brown (2015) 74–79.

108 Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 6, 10.

109 See for a recent study: Rose, P.J., (2013), *A Commentary on Augustine's De cura pro mortuis gerenda* (Leiden, 2013), 7–12 (dating of the work), 315–404 (study of Curma's story); also Duval, Y., (1988), *Auprès des saints, corps et âme. L'inhumation "ad sanctos" dans la chrétienté d'Orient et d'Occident du III<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris), 3–20; Klöckener, M., (1996), 'Cura pro mortuis gerenda, De-', *AL* 2, fasc. 1/2 (1996), 182–188 with bibliography. For a recent analysis setting the treatise in Augustine's broader thought on the care of the dead, see Hincker, V., (2017), *Se soucier des morts de l'Antiquité aux premiers siècles du Moyen Âge: la parole de saint Augustin à l'épreuve des enjeux socio-anthropologiques des funérailles et du tombeau* (Université de Caen, PhD. Thesis), 19–197.

since seeing the dead in dreams is simply the result of a vision and does not provide evidence of communication with the otherworld. As noted by Dulaey, in the *De genesi ad litteram*, Augustine had admitted that visions could really connect to the otherworld: he denies it here, years later, while recognising that having visions of the dead remains a possibility in general.<sup>110</sup> For Augustine, the main reason for rejecting the reality of these visions is that they also include living individuals who obviously are unaware of it. Despite rejecting Curma's story as proof of communication with the dead, Augustine still exploits it for another end: promoting baptism in his own community.

Augustine heard about Curma's story two years after it happened, while sharing a meal with a friend, probably a clergyman. The story interested him so much that he organised a meeting to have the story told by the protagonist.<sup>111</sup> However, the story told in his treatise is not a simple transcription of Curma's words: Augustine carefully constructs Curma's narrative to fit the broader argument of his treatise. He first summarises the beginning and end of the visions: Curma told Augustine that he lay unconscious in bed for days, had a number of visions and finally awoke. He immediately asked around him to look for a certain Curma, the smith of his own town, before everyone realised that in fact the man had died at the very time when Curma, the *curialis pauper*, regained consciousness. Curma realised that he had been called by mistake in place of the smith. Instead of describing in detail the content of Curma's visions, Augustine then concentrates on features that demonstrate the general point of his discussion in the treatise: Curma did not really communicate with the otherworld. Within this discussion, Curma's baptism is mentioned twice: first Augustine tells of Curma's vision of being baptised by him, which follows the request of a priest (*presbyter*) of his town (Thullium), who sends Curma to Hippo. For Augustine, this proves that Curma's visions are unreal, since he could not have interacted with living individuals elsewhere as he lay in bed.<sup>112</sup> Second, in the final part of Augustine's narrative, this dreamt baptism is rejected and then really experienced in Hippo:

110 Dulaey, M., (1973), *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin* (Paris), 205–210; on Augustine and the otherworld, and his rejection of visions, in particular in Augustine, *Ep.* 158–159 see for instance Brown (2015), 70–82.

111 Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12.15: “*Biennio vel amplius transacto ego haec cuncta cognovi: primo per quendam meum eiusque amicum in convivio meo, cum quaedam talia loqueremur; deinde institi ac feci, ut haec mihi praesens ipse narraret*” (Zycha, J., *CSEL* 41 (1900), 646).

112 Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15. Rose (2013), 354–404 offers a detailed literary analysis of the rhetorical devices that Augustine used to argue for his case.

He added that he had been led into Paradise and that he was told when he was dismissed to return to his family: "Go, be baptised, if you wish to be in this place of the blessed". Then, on being admonished that he be baptised by me, he replied that this had already been done. Again, the same one advised him as before: "Go, receive true baptism, for you saw in a vision that baptism of which you spoke". After he recovered, he came to Hippo. And, as Easter was drawing near, he gave his name among the other *competentes*, although like many others he was unknown to us. For he took care not to make known that vision to me or to anyone of our group.<sup>113</sup>

Augustine draws an opposition between Curma's inconclusive visions and their concrete outcome, noting that these unreal visions still had a decisive impact on his life. Although several studies have suggested that Augustine's story is merely based on a series of *topoi* taken from other anecdotes found in Greek, Latin and early Christian literature, it remains highly plausible that Augustine truly heard this story from Curma and his witnesses.<sup>114</sup> After all, Augustine emphasises that the story has nothing supernatural or special to it: Curma had a near-death experience and recovered, he saw his baptism in the nearby city and its famous bishop, and his dream ended when he realised that it was not real. As we have already noted, dreams are cited as a major conversion motive in Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* sent to Deogratias of Carthage.<sup>115</sup> Nothing, except the anecdote of the two Curma, seems implausible.<sup>116</sup> Dossey reads this story as an extraordinary event and assumes that Curma should normally have

113 Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15: "*Denique post multa, quae vidit, etiam in paradisum se introductum esse narravit dictumque sibi esse, cum inde dimitteretur rediturus ad suos: vade, baptizare, si vis esse in isto loco beatorum. Deinde, ut a me baptizaretur, admonitus iam factum esse respondit. Cui rursus ille, qui cum eo loquebatur, vade, inquit, vere baptizare; nam illud in visione vidisti. Post ista convaluit, perrexit Hipponem. Pascha iam propinquabat, dedit nomen inter alios competentes, pariter cum plurimis incognitus nobis; nec illam mihi visionem nec cuiquam nostrorum indicare curavit*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 646; Lacy, J.A., *FOC* 27 (1955), 372).

114 For literary parallels: Dulaey (1973), 205–210; Ciccarese, M.-P., (1987), 'Agostino tra Plinio e Gregorio Magno metamorfosi cristiana di un aneddoto', in *Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione, Roma 15–20 settembre 1986* (Rome), 133–138; Bremmer, J., (2002), *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London), 95–96 (describing Curma's narrative as the first Christian near-death experience and evoking the parallel with a fragment of Plutarch's *On the Soul* quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparatio Evangelica* 11, 36); Rose (2013), 326–329.

115 The parallel with *Cat. rud.* is already suggested in Harmless (2014), 291–292.

116 As noted by Dulaey (1973), 205–210. The anecdote is precisely the only part that finds a parallel in Plutarch's story (see note 114).

been baptised by the clergy in his own town.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Augustine rejects these visions as unreal not because they are extraordinary, but because they point to real people and real events that have not taken place but were dreamt.<sup>118</sup> In the end, however, the realistic part of the dream came true. There is no obvious reason not to read the narrative as a description of a common initiation procedure: the candidate, a local ordinary *curialis* coming from the countryside near Hippo, is sent, after approval of the local priest (*presbyter*), to prepare for baptism in Hippo, and arrives during Lent to enrol for baptism. The account also provides particularly interesting insights into Augustine's conceptions. The invitation to baptism of the doorkeepers, in a sense representing Augustine's view, emphasises that Curma's recovery was a chance to seek baptism and later enter paradise. The rejection of the dreamt baptism and the narrative of a dying unbaptised man who is barred from entering paradise serves to highlight that catechumens need to seek baptism while they are still healthy and conscious.<sup>119</sup> The vision underlines Curma's anxieties as he was about to die without baptism and the extraordinary opportunity that he was granted to set things right. He received the specific sign of God's will that was eagerly awaited by Firmus and other catechumens like him. His story both reinforces the power of dreams in the decision process and serves as an incentive for others to take the step.

In this respect, Curma's baptism is not very different from another story told in the *De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus*, most probably written in 424 as a reply to a series of questions of Dulcitius.<sup>120</sup> Most replies are compiled from other works of Augustine, but a complement in the answer to the seventh question includes an interesting conversion narrative. The question asks what to answer to those who say that while Abimelech was prevented from raping Sarah, the Pharaoh lay in bed with her (see Gn 12, 14–20 and Gn 20, 1–6), a passage mocked by the Manichaeans and thus mostly refuted here by quoting passages of the *Contra*

117 Dossey, L., (2010), *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley-London), 149–150.

118 Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15: "*Ipsos autem vere forsitan credidissem, si non inter illa quasi somnia sua vidisset etiam quosdam, qui nunc usque adhuc vivunt, clericos videlicet aliquos regionis suae, a quorum ibi presbytero audivit, ut apud Hipponem baptizaretur a me, quod et factum esse dicebat. [...] Nam et fundum vidit, ubi erat ille cum clericis presbyter, et Hipponem, ubi a me quasi baptizatus est: in quibus locis profecto non erat, quando illic sibi esse videbatur*" (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 645–646).

119 The concern for the full consciousness and choice of candidates who travel to be baptised recalls the uncertainties over the baptism of an unconscious *competens* discussed in the correspondance between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe in the early sixth century (see Chapter 6).

120 Dulaey, M., (2012), 'Octo Dulcitii quaestionibus (De –)', *AL* 3, 7/8 (2012), 277–281.



*Faustum*. For Augustine, there is no reason to believe that the Pharaoh had the opportunity to sleep with Sara after he took her as his wife, since God's torments inflicted upon the Pharaoh prevented it.<sup>121</sup> He then tells an anecdote to prove that the God of the Old Testament is the same who does wonders in *Mauritania Sitifensis*: a young *catechumenus* named Celticius abducted a widow, who had made a vow of chastity, and planned to marry her. However, before he could lie in bed with her, he fell deeply asleep and, frightened by a dream, handed her to the bishop of Sitifis. Then, because of this dream, Celticius decided to seek baptism and he was now a venerable bishop.<sup>122</sup> His decision, as in Curma's case, follows a dream of admonition and the outcome is a radical change of life, which is sanctioned by baptism. Augustine, more than in Curma's case, is attentive to emphasise that it is through God's intervention that Celticius radically changed his behaviour.

In the last book of the *De civitate Dei*, God's visible intervention comes even more clearly at the forefront of the narratives: the introduction of the relics and cult of Stephen and the many miracles claimed at the shrine, brought Augustine to make full use of these miracles in his apologetical work.<sup>123</sup> A series of conversion narratives aim at showing that miracles continue in Augustine's Africa. They can be connected to *Ep.* 227, sent at the end of Augustine's life, between 428 and 430, and narrating the conversion and baptism of a reluctant pagan, Dioscorus, who fell ill several times, first because he initially refused to seek baptism although he had taken a vow for the healing of his daughter, then

121 Augustine, *Dulc. qu.* 7, 1–2.

122 Augustine, *Dulc. qu.* 7, 3 (CCSL 44A, 289): "*Dicam quod factum est in Mauritania Sitifensi. Neque enim deus sanctorum patrum non ipse est etiam deus noster. Viduam in proposito continentiae constitutam Celticius quidam catechumenus iuvenis rapuit, ut haberet uxorem. Antequam concumberent pressus somno et territus somnio Sitifensi episcopo eam vehementissime requirenti revocavit intactam. Vivunt adhuc de quibus loquor. Ille baptizatus et ipso in se facto miraculo conversus ad deum, ad episcopatum venerabili probitate pervenit, illa in sancta viduitate persistit*" (Mutzenbecher, A., CCSL 44A (1975), 289).

123 On the miracles in *Civ.* XXII, see in particular, with references and bibliography, Bardy, G., *BA* 34 (1959), 544–545; *BA* 37 (1960), 752–755, 825–831, 835–836; Boesch Gajano, S., (1996), 'Verità e pubblicità: i racconti dei miracoli nel libro XXII del *De civitate Dei*', in Cavalcanti, E., (ed.), (1996), *Il De civitate Dei. L'opera, le interpretazioni, l'influsso* (Rome), 367–388; Fraisse, A., (2005), 'La théologie du miracle dans la Cité de Dieu et le témoignage du De miraculis sancti Stephani', in Lancel, S., Guédon, S., Maurin, L., (eds.), (2005), *Saint Augustin. La Numidie et la société de son temps. Actes du colloque SEMPAM-AUSONIUS, Bordeaux, 10–11 octobre 2003* (Bordeaux), 131–143; Schindler, A., (2009), 'Hagiographie und Hagiologie in Augustins Werk', in Oort, J. van, and Wyrwa, D., (eds.), (2009), *Autobiographie und Hagiographie in der christlichen Antike* (Leuven-Walpole, MA), 89–129, esp. 114–129. More generally see studies in note 106.

because he failed to recite the creed from memory during the preparation.<sup>124</sup> In the *De civitate Dei*, as in the letter, the rite of baptism is seen as a time when God's power is made visible to all and, in this case, healing blesses either the baptised individual or others who meet them. Augustine tells the story of Innocentia, an aristocrat from Carthage with breast cancer. She was healed after a dream advising her to seek the first woman exiting the baptistery at Easter and receive from her the sign of the cross on her breast.<sup>125</sup> The correspondence between the healer and the healed, and the mention of the fact that the healing occurs rightly after baptism, make clear that healing comes from baptism. Other narratives in the same book further stress the efficacy of baptism: Augustine narrates the miraculous healing of a doctor, a mime and the reluctant pagan Marcialis, the latter accepting baptism only in emergency, following prayers of his son-in-law at saint Stephen's shrine.<sup>126</sup>

In these stories, Augustine recapitulates the early and recurrent arguments in favour of baptism as a necessity found in his sermons, letters and other works, with the Devil suggesting postponement, staunch pagans and catechumens refusing the cleansing of sins but being rebuked by God, and the radical transformation enacted by baptism. As in the case of sermons, Augustine employs images of incompleteness and imperfection, contrasting the incurable illnesses with the miraculous healing of baptism. From the *De cura pro mortuis*

124 Augustine, *Ep.* 227: "*Filia eius, in qua unica adquiescebat, aegrotabat et usque ad totam desperationem salutis temporalis eodem ipso patre renuntiante pervenit. Dicitur ergo [...] ille senex tandem conversus ad inplorandam Christi misericordiam voto se obligasse christianum fore, si illam salvam videret. Factum est. At ille, quod voverat, dissimulabat exolvere. Sed adhuc manus excelsa. Nam repentina caecitate suffunditur statimque venit in mentem, unde illud esset. Exclamauit confitens atque iterum vovit se recepto lumine impleturum esse, quod voverat. Recepit, implevit. Et adhuc manus excelsa. Symbolum non tenuerat aut fortasse tenere recusaverat et se non potuisse excusaverat. Deus viderit. Iam tamen post festa omnia receptionis suae in paralyisin solvitur multis ac paene omnibus membris tunc somnio admonitus confitens per scripturam ob hoc sibi dictum esse accidisse, quod symbolum non reddiderit. Post illam confessionem redduntur officia membrorum omnium nisi linguae solius*" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 482–483). The letter is also noted by Lancel (1999b), 657–658 and Lancel (2006), 76. In Pignot (2016), 473–478 further arguments for a dating in 428–430 are provided and the letter is analysed in more detail. See also Chapter 4, p. 226 for discussion of this letter in connection to the rite of recitation of the creed.

125 Augustine, *Ciu.* XXII, 8.4: "*In eadem Carthagine Innocentia, religiosissima femina, de primariis ipsius civitatis, in mamilla cancrum habebat, rem, sicut medici dicunt, nullis medicamentis sanabilem. [...] Admonetur in somnis propinquante pascha, ut in parte feminarum observanti ad baptisterium, quaecumque illi baptizata primitus occurrisset, signaret ei locum signo Christi. Fecit, confestim sanitas consecuta est*" (Dombart, B., Kalb, A., *CCSL* 48 (1981), 818).

126 Respectively Augustine, *Ciu.* XXII, 8.5, 8.6 and 8.14.

*gerenda* and *De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus* to the *De civitate Dei*, Augustine progressively gave more weight to miracle stories triggering conversion and baptism, in a fashion that was particularly popular in Late Antiquity.<sup>127</sup> Although these stories are not invitations to baptism preached in a particular liturgical context, they fit the general purpose of showing the power of baptism and encouraging readers to seek baptism. Augustine now argued against the view that miracles had ceased to occur in his times. In the course of his pastoral work as bishop of Hippo, Augustine seems to have progressively realised that dreams and miraculous interventions were clearly an important device, understood and shared by his audience, to bring catechumens to baptism. While the *Confessiones* emphasised the necessity of baptism by rejecting wrong motives for postponement in a way similar to sermons and letters, these later works focused on special events triggering baptism and demonstrating its necessity and power.

#### 4 Conclusion

Beyond the specific liturgical context of Lenten sermons of invitation to enter the baptismal preparation, bringing catechumens to baptism was a major task of Augustine's pastoral care throughout his life. In sermons, Augustine strove to show that baptism was essential particularly employing liturgical readings to convince his audience, often in a context of polemics. The fight for members against Donatists meant that bringing catechumens to ask for baptism was a decisive step in building a cohesive community. For Augustine, catechumens could feel unworthy of baptism or on the contrary could consider that baptism was useless. Identifying these categories of catechumens in his audience enabled him to address his audience's reluctance to seek baptism. Letters and works testify to Augustine's efforts outside the context of preaching: resorting to similar arguments, Augustine wrote letters to prominent friends to reach a wider audience of catechumens and exhort them to baptism, employing biblical and classical references redefining the meaning of friendship. The letter to Firmus in particular shows concretely how catechumens negotiated

<sup>127</sup> Among many examples, late antique accounts of martyrdom deserve a special mention as they very often relate conversion and baptism to miraculous events, in particular healing. See for instance the well-diffused Roman *passiones* (among which the famous *Passio Sebastiani* BHL 7543, which also describes the ceremonies of enrolment for baptism following healing miracles), discussed in Heid, S., (2013b), 'Die Taufe in Rom nach den frühen römischen Märtyrerlegenden', *RAC* 89, 217–252.

their Christian membership with Augustine and demonstrates his influence in the teaching of catechumens in Carthage. Firmus was eager to learn more about Christianity and consulted Augustine as an expert on religious matters; Augustine organised the reading of his *De civitate Dei* which attracted catechumens like Firmus. However, the bishop considered that approaching Christianity was not enough: he rejected the value of religious education that would not lead to receive baptism and exhorted his correspondent to take the step. Augustine's works both encapsulated arguments found in sermons and letters and offered specific viewpoints through the narration of exemplary stories. As the letter to Firmus, the *Confessiones* underlined the importance of the household in the decision to be baptised; later works, on the other hand, both emphasised the imperfection of catechumens depicted as ill and helpless and the radical change brought by baptism, granting health and protection in this life and the next.

The catechumens' intermediary membership was essential for the process of Christianisation in late antique communities. While progressively developing a sense of belonging would have been attractive for newcomers as a first but cautious step into Christianity, from Augustine's perspective, it allowed churches to bring individuals to Christianity without having to renounce a strict set of requirements for receiving baptism.<sup>128</sup> It is clear that, far from being indifferent, catechumens assessed the decision of preparing for baptism most carefully. However, this mechanism meant that catechumens could question the necessity of swift baptism, offering a challenge to Augustine and other bishops arguing for baptism as the decisive marker of Christian belonging. For catechumens baptism could represent the final achievement and the climax of this religious experience. Augustine, however, saw baptism as a basic requirement. Augustine rejected arguments against baptism and at the same time presented the intermediary membership of catechumens as temporary and challenging, because of its liminality. He attempted to overcome it with the more clear-cut identity of the baptised, by underlining the power of baptism and its inevitable character.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Augustine recalled his catechumenate and baptism in Milan as the natural outcome of his Christian upbringing as a *catechumenus* in Africa. The attempt to include catechumens in rituals and teaching, explored in Chapter 2 were part of the same mechanism: although Augustine's youth was largely spent as a catechumen, and Hippo and Carthage,

<sup>128</sup> This excludes emergency baptism, for instance mass baptism in cases of natural disaster, as after an earthquake in Palestine mentioned by Augustine, S. 19, 6.

where Augustine mainly preached, were divided between the catechumens and the baptised, as a cleric he constantly aimed at building a sense of shared belonging with corresponding rituals and behaviour that would transcend these differences. As he commented on Augustine's invitation to baptism on the basis of John 6, 55, Harmless noted that "this division within his own congregation bothered him. Thus the rousing appeals. He wanted to dismantle the barriers such readings created, but he knew he could pull down the walls only if they heard him "knocking" and so enrolled for the Lenten training".<sup>129</sup> Rebillard similarly concluded that Augustine did not want to distinguish between catechumens and baptised Christians in his pastoral care; both scholars agreed that the postponement of baptism did not constitute a major phenomenon.<sup>130</sup> This investigation has shown otherwise: while Augustine indeed aimed at going beyond this distinction, his writings betray the significance of catechumens as a specific category within his community that needs to be taken into account: it constituted the essential framework for his definition of Christian belonging. Augustine's writings offer a rare opportunity to shed light on the fact that such clear-cut views on baptism were developed in a great variety of contexts throughout Augustine's life against the widespread and peculiar Christian membership of catechumens. The next chapter will explore the final incorporation of these catechumens into the community of the faithful, through an intense ritual preparation in the week preceding Lent Following this initiation, understood as the final goal of the whole ritual process, will lead us to reach a comprehensive overview of Augustine's catechumenate.

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129 Harmless (2014), 200.

130 Rebillard (2012a), 65–66. See as well note 2.

## From *catechumenus* to *fidelis*: The Lenten Preparation for Baptism in Hippo

The catechumens who followed Augustine's recommendations and decided to ask for baptism, would not receive it in a day, but had to undergo an intense process of ritual and catechetical integration. The initiation in the weeks preceding baptism at Easter was designed to bring candidates to a radical transformation of body and mind. Augustine's imagery of birth now took its most dramatic turn, as the Church was enduring the last pains of labour and candidates were striving to be born. They received a new name, *competentes* ("those who ask together"), and entered a specific ritual preparation, including fasting, vigils, penance, regular examination and religious teaching, all meant to completely transform them, as they experienced the great cleansing of all past sins and a "new birth" into full Christian membership. Compared to the status and rituals of the *catechumeni* before their enrolment for baptism, explored in Chapter 2, the pre-baptismal initiation, with its "awe-inspiring" rites, is certainly a much better known part of the early Christian catechumenate.<sup>1</sup> It has been studied widely by specialists of baptism, in investigations on the creed and the Lord's prayer, and more broadly in pastoral and liturgical studies, often comparing the practices of preparation in contemporary sources from across the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Augustine's case is peculiar in terms of the available evidence: unlike Ambrose of Milan, Cyril/John of Jerusalem or Theodore of Mopsuestia, he offers us no set of baptismal catecheses, but only a small number of sermons on the creed and the Lord's prayer and a set of Easter sermons.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the significance of Augustine's figure and the sheer amount of scattered references in his writings beyond Lenten catecheses, have made of him one of the most quoted and studied sources in modern scholarship. Numerous works shed light on the ritual aspects of the preparation.<sup>4</sup>

1 The phrase is found in the title of Yarnold (1994).

2 See the studies listed in the Introduction, in particular notes 31 and 38–40.

3 It is worth noting, more broadly, that no such catecheses have been preserved for any African writer (the closest example are the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, which however, as I will argue in the next chapter, do not all necessarily come from a single author; moreover, they do not cover the baptismal rites). This brings questions on the peculiarity of African practices or of the transmission of African catecheses.

4 See Introduction, note 44.

However, scholarship is often based on old assumptions and investigations, too often summarised in more recent studies, which are in turn generally limited to a standard selection of references, merging Augustine's evidence with contemporary practices from other regions. Recently, Harmless and Brons have provided more nuanced and particularly detailed studies of Augustine's pre-baptismal catechesis, with good analysis of the content of sermons preached to candidates to baptism and the rituals related to them.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the well-studied content of Augustine's catechesis will not need to be my focus here; rather, this chapter will aim at providing an up-to-date overview of what is known about the concrete organisation of the baptismal preparation according to Augustine's writings, dealing in particular with neglected or debated issues as the "scrutinies" and the significance of exorcism, the *disciplina arcani*, the role of sponsors, and the dating of the rites of transmission of the creed and the Lord's prayer, the last two rites marking the end of the catechumenate and leading to the baptismal rites. This synthesis will highlight both broader trends in initiation practices and peculiar and concrete features witnessed by Augustine, pointing to local diversity in the way catechumens were initiated and to the need to refrain from applying later, medieval or modern views on the ritual practices of late antique Africa.

## 1 Enrolling as a *competens*

The first step for candidates was to enrol: they were required to give their names to register for baptism. This procedure, widely attested in late antique Christianity, is termed in Latin "*dare nomen* (giving one's name)", a phrase which borrows from the vocabulary of military recruitment and in a sense extends the military metaphor of the initiation, already developed for instance with the use of *sacramentum* and in the practice of signing foreheads of catechumens as a sign of ownership and belonging to the community.<sup>6</sup> The practice

<sup>5</sup> Harmless (2014), 291–403; Brons (2017), 117–203.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance: Siricius, *Ep.* 1, 2.3: "*his dumtaxat electis qui ante quadraginta vel eo amplius dies nomen dederint*" (PL 13 (1845), 1135); Egeria, *Itinerarium* 45: "*Nam qui dat nomen suum, ante diem quadragesimarum dat*" (Maraval, P., SC 296 (1982), 304); Ambrose, *De sacramentis* 111, 2.12: "*Ergo quando dedisti nomen tuum*" (Faller, O., CSEL 73 (1955), 44); Ambrose, *De Helia et ieiunio* 21, 79: "*Et tu dedisti nomen tuum ad agonem Christi, subscripsisti ad competitionem coronae*" (Schenkl, CSEL 32/2 (1897), 460); Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* IV, 76: "*Nemo adhuc dedit nomen suum*" (Adriaen, M., CCSL 14 (1957), 160); *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, Canon 23 (LXXXV), "*Baptizandi nomen suum dent*" (Munier, C., CCSL 148 (1963), 170–171); *Passio Sebastiani* 31: "*accedat unusquisque vestrum, et det nomen suum, ut hodierno die usque*

is mentioned with this specific phrase in the calls of Augustine to catechumens discussed in the preceding chapter and in a few other instances, at times explicitly connecting the ceremony to the period preceding Easter.<sup>7</sup> Augustine simply refers to the practice as the first required step to prepare for baptism, without any specific explanation on how it was organised, for instance whether the names of candidates were written down.<sup>8</sup> Those who enrolled to prepare for baptism received a new name, *competens*, to be distinguished from the generic category *catechumenus*, referring to catechumens who had not yet entered the preparation for baptism.<sup>9</sup> In the *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* and in his letter to Marcianus, Augustine employs the phrase “*dare nomen inter competentes*”, to relate the registration to admission into a new group within the community. Moreover, in the *De fide et operibus* and Sermon 216, Augustine defines the *competentes* as those who “ask together” (*cum-petere*) for baptism.<sup>10</sup> Sermon 228, preached on Easter day, explains that after baptism, they were not to be called *competentes* any more but *infantes* (newborns), since “they were called askers, because they were agitating their mother’s womb, asking to be born”.<sup>11</sup> This evidence shows that *competentes* were both singled out and bound together as a specific group in order to underline the process of radical commitment and ritual transformation which they were entering. As we have already seen,

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*ad vesperam percurrente jejunio, festivum baptismatis sacramentum opportunum tempus inveniat [...] et unusquisque nomen suum festinabat priusquam interrogaretur offerre*”; 51: “*Tunc Chromatius urbis Romae praefectus, cum unico filio suo Tiburtio, dedit nomen suum*” (PL 17 (1845), 1035–1036 and 1043; C. Lanéry prepares a new edition). The phrase is used as well to refer to ordination: Zosimus, *Ep.* 9, 3.5: “*Si ab infantia ecclesiasticis ministeriis nomen dedit*” (PL 20 (1845), 672). On the military imagery: Poque (1984), I, 40–47.

- 7 Augustine, S. 132, 1 “*ecce pascha est, da nomen ad baptismum*” (PL 38 (1841), 735); S. 213, 1 “*nomina vestra dedistis ad baptismum*” (Morin, MA 1 (1930), 441); S. 229, 1: “*nomina vestra dedistis*” (Morin, G., MA 1 (1930), 30); S. 302 (= 302 + Guelf. 25), 3: “*nomen Christo dedimus*” (Lambot, C., SPM 1 (1950), 102); *Conf.* VIII, 2.4: “*nomen dedit ut per baptismum regeneraretur*” (Verheijen, CCSL 27 (1981), 116); *Conf.* IX, 6.14: “*tempus advenit quo me nomen dare oportet*” (Verheijen, CCSL 27 (1981), 140); *F. et op.* 6.8: “*eandem gratiam percepturi suis nominibus datis*”; 6, 9: “*sua nomina iam dederunt*” (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 43 and 45); Ciu. XXII, 8.5: “*dedisset nomen ad baptismum*” (Dombart-Kalb, CCSL 48 (1981), 819); *Cura mort.* 12, 15: “*dedit nomen inter alios competentes*” (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 646); *Ep.* 258, 4: “*nomen vel dedisse inter competentes vel daturum esse*” (Goldbacher, CSEL 57 (1911), 610).

- 8 The absence of concrete descriptions is also underlined by Brons (2017), 122–123.

- 9 See about the technical distinction of these two terms, Introduction, pp. 26–27.

- 10 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9: “*cum fontis illius sacramenta peteremus atque ob hoc competentes etiam vocaremur*” (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 44); S. 216, 1: “*Quid enim aliud sunt competentes, quam simul petentes?*” (PL 38 (1841), 1077).

- 11 Augustine, S. 228, 1: “*Competentes dicebantur, quoniam materna viscera, ut nascerentur, petendo pulsabant*” (PL 38 (1841), 1101; Hill, WSA III/7 (1993), 157).



Augustine uses this term only, shunning the alternative term *electus*, which is attested in Italy and in Ambrose in particular—perhaps because of its use by the Manichaean elect—thus showing regional difference and the limits of his debt towards his own initiation in Milan.<sup>12</sup>

Augustine's allusive references can be set in a wider context. The *Itinerarium* of Egeria, provides a most rare late antique description of the ceremony of enrolment, as it was practised in the Church of Jerusalem towards the end of the fourth century at the time of bishop Cyril (early 380s): the names of candidates were written down on a register by a priest before the beginning of Lent, then, at the beginning of Lent—which lasted eight weeks—each candidate, accompanied by a godfather or a godmother, according to their gender, had to come forward in front of the bishop seated on his *cathedra* and surrounded by two priests. The bishop would then ask the sponsors about the habits and conduct of the candidate. The names of those who appeared to lead an impeccable life were written down by the bishop himself and they were admitted to prepare baptism, while the others were dismissed and ordered to mend their ways.<sup>13</sup> Egeria adds the interesting remark that foreigners would find it very difficult to enter the baptismal preparation without good witnesses to testify about their conduct.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Egeria's account describes the enrolment as an examination, putting emphasis on the interrogation of habits in front of the clergy and the role played by witnesses who sponsor the candidates. Around the same period in Jerusalem, the bishop Cyril offers corresponding evidence on the role of sponsors and mentions the enrolment, adding that admitted candidates may still hide wrong behaviour and thus require penance before baptism.<sup>15</sup> This evidence from Jerusalem sheds light on the otherwise barely known proced-

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 1, note 101.

<sup>13</sup> A similar procedure (examination of conduct, role of sponsors, inscription) is attested for Antioch by Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 12, 14–16, who also states that the names of sponsors are written down together with the candidate's name.

<sup>14</sup> Egeria, *Itinerarium* 45. For overviews on the catechumenate in the *itinerarium* and in Jerusalem more broadly, see in particular Saxer (1988), 195–214; Pasquato (2004), 442–445; Metzger (2004), 520–523; Gavriluk (2007), 163–214.

<sup>15</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 5 (on the need of a change of behaviour before baptism even if one has gone through the examination, *PG* 33 (1857), 340–341); *Cat.* 15, 18 and 26 (on sponsors, *PG* 33 (1857), 896A and 908C). For Cyril's prebaptismal catechesis and the mystagogical catecheses, with the issue of authorship, see Piédagnel, A., *sc* 126bis (1988), 9–78; Doval, A., (2001), *Cyril of Jerusalem Mystagogue. The Authorship of the Mystagogic Catecheses* (Washington), 11–25 and 48–50; Day, J., (2007), *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem. Fourth- and Fifth-Century Evidence from Palestine, Syria and Egypt* (Aldershot), esp. 11–25 and 26–56; Johnson (2007), 121–124.

ure of enrolment. Bearing in mind that practices varied locally, only a detailed study of the features of the enrolment witnessed by Augustine can provide a basis for useful comparisons with these contemporary sources.

### 1.1 *The Time for Enrolment*

Although Lent is most probably implied, Augustine does not precisely situate the ceremony in the liturgical year: in the *Confessiones* and the *De fide et operibus* he only refers to the fitting time (*tempus*),<sup>16</sup> in the latter treatise also speaking of a yearly preparation, taking place over a number of days,<sup>17</sup> while in other instances the ceremony is simply set before Easter.<sup>18</sup> Sermons preached by Augustine every year at the beginning of Lent to the wider congregation provide further clues.<sup>19</sup> They clearly situate the baptismal preparation during Lent and baptism at Easter, as was common in the West in Late Antiquity—although Pentecost is also accepted as a date for conferring baptism.<sup>20</sup> In Sermon 210, most likely preached at the beginning of Lent in an

16 Augustine, *Conf.* IX, 6.14; *F. et op.* 6, 9.

17 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 8: “*Si per ipsos dies quibus eandem gratiam percepturi, suis nominibus datis [...]*”; 6.9: “*Vel non intueamur alios, qui per annos singulos ad lavacrum regenerationis adcurrunt, quales sint ipsis diebus, quibus catechizantur, exorcizantur, scrutantur [...]* hoc fit multo diligentius et instantius his diebus, quibus competentes vocantur, cum ad percipiendum baptismum sua nomina iam dederunt” (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 43–45).

18 Augustine, *Ciu.* XXII, 8.5; *Cura mort.* 12, 15. No precise context is provided in *Ep.* 258, 4; *S.* 213, 1; 228, 1; 229, 1; 302, 3.

19 Augustine *S.* 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211. In *S.* 205, 1, Lent is described as the time of the new man. On these sermons, see Marotta, B., (2006), ‘Il digiuno in alcuni *Sermones* di Agostino: modi e significati’, *Auctores Nostri* 4, 577–597; Margoni-Kögler (2010), 81–95 (for possible readings); Brons (2017), 87–89. On Lent in Augustine’s community in general see Klöckener, M., (2018), ‘Quadragesima, quadraginta dies’, *AL* 4, fasc. 7/8, 1013–1020.

20 There is little evidence for baptism at Pentecost in Hippo, despite what is stated in Cabié, R., *La Pentecôte. L’évolution de la Cinquantaine pascale au cours des cinq premiers siècles* (Tournai, 1965) 203–209 on the basis of Augustine’s Sermon 272 preached to neophytes but without clear evidence that it was for Pentecost (most scholars agree with a dating at Easter, see Verbraken (1976), 125 for a list of hypotheses; Margoni-Kögler (2010), 135 n. 397). Lambot notes that the sermon is transmitted in manuscripts within a series of Easter sermons, see Lambot, C., (1956), ‘Les sermons de saint Augustin pour les fêtes de Pâques. 1. Tradition manuscrite’, in *Mélanges en l’honneur de Monseigneur Michel Andrieu (Revue des sciences religieuses, volume hors série)* (Strasbourg), 263–277, reprinted in *RBen* 79 (1969), 148–163, at 154). Nevertheless, Tertullian (*De baptismo* 19), who already witnesses the practice of baptising at Easter, also states that Pentecost is another fitting time. For late antique Rome, see Siricius, *Ep.* 1, 1.2; Leo the Great, *Ep.* 16, 3 and 168, 1; Gelasius, *Ep.* 14, 10. For overviews on the emergence of Lent and initiation at Easter, see Johnson (2007), 201–218 and Bradshaw, P., Johnson, M.E., (2011), *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville MN), 75–113.

unknown year, Augustine explains that Easter is the common time to receive baptism after a Lenten preparation of fasting and repentance, shared by all members of the community. The close connection between the initiation of catechumens and the Lenten period, more broadly understood as a period of penance preceding Easter, further reinforced the penitential character of the initiation. Besides the polemical *De fide et operibus*, and Sermon 352A (= Dolbeau 14) related to the same polemic, Sermons 351 and 352 on penance, describe pre-baptismal penance during Lent as a requirement for any individual wanting to be baptised.<sup>21</sup> In Sermon 210, however, Augustine sharply distinguishes Easter as a unique feast day, and baptism, that can be performed at any time, Easter only being the most popular time.<sup>22</sup> Augustine contrasts common habits and the theological conceptions that should underlie them: it would not be appropriate to impose Easter or any other time for baptism. Thus he adds: “but the fact that far and away the greater number of those seeking baptism converge on this day only means that the greater joy of the feast attracts them, not that a richer grace of salvation is to be had then”,<sup>23</sup> This perspective reflects Augustines’ theological concern to highlight the efficacy and validity of baptism at any time of the year. Nevertheless, Augustine’s other sermons and his statement in Sermon 210 about the common practice show that preparation for baptism, and thus the ceremony of enrolment, regularly took place in Lent as a particularly fitting time to repent from one’s past life before being reborn in baptism.

Invitations to enter the baptismal preparation in sermons that I have discussed in the previous chapter provide further evidence. While, as I have suggested, Augustine could invite catechumens for baptism in sermons at other periods of the year, a number of sermons can convincingly be situated during Lent, showing how, every year, Augustine called for the enrolment of catechumens to prepare for baptism.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that even these Lenten invitations are not precisely dated and leave room for interpretation. The case of invitations found in the three sermons on John (*Io. eu. tr.* 10–11–

21 Augustine, S. 351, 2.2; 352, 1.2–1.6. The authenticity of S. 351 has sometimes been doubted but is generally accepted, see Verbraken (1976), 147 with bibliography. For points of contact between *F. et op.*; S. 351 and 352A (= Dolbeau 14), see Hombert (2000), 463–464.

22 Augustine, S. 210, 1.2.

23 Augustine, S. 210, 1.2: “*Sed quod ad illum diem longe maior baptizandorum numerus confluit, non gratia uberior salutis hic distat, sed laetitia maior festivitatis invitat*” (PL 38 (1841), 1048; Hill, WSA III/7 (1993), 119).

24 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 10, 11; 11, 3–9; 12, 2–3; S. 132, 1–2; the sermons on John 9, 1–41: S. 135, 1 and 5–6; S. 136B (= Lambot 10), 1–3; *Io. eu. tr.* 44, 2–8 and probably as well S. 97A, 1–2; 392, 2–6; 335H (= Lambot 26), 3 (see our discussion of these sermons in Chapter 3, 1.1, pp. 148–150).

12) deserves particular attention, since their dating has often been based on assumptions about the formal organisation of the Lenten preparation in Hippo. These three sermons are part of a longer series preached in a given year and alternating the first sixteen homilies on John's Gospel (*Io. eu. tr.* 1–12) with explanations of Psalms (*In Ps.* 119–133, *In Ps.* 95 and *In Ps.* 21, 11),<sup>25</sup> then continuing with John's Gospel (*Io. eu. tr.* 13–16), after an interruption and the preaching, for the Easter Octave and later, of a series on John's letter (*Ep. Io. tr.*). Following La Bonnardière's study, scholars agree that the series should be situated in the context of the Donatist controversy, after the edict of Honorius against Donatists in 405 and before the Conference of Carthage in 411.<sup>26</sup> While La Bonnardière suggested more precisely the range 406–409, she favoured winter-spring 406–407 because of the identification of the ongoing pagan "*festivitas sanguinis*" mentioned by Augustine in *Io. eu. tr.* 7,<sup>27</sup> preached on a Sunday, with

25 This sermon was added to the series by La Bonnardière (1965), 54–56; see now Dulaey, M., *BA* 57/B (2009), 151–156 and 316 (n.c. 8).

26 The fact that the whole set of 124 sermons on John (*Io. eu. tr.*) were not preached as a unit but put together on the basis of separate series was already highlighted by Zarb, S.M., (1933), 'Chronologia Tractatum s. Augustini in Euangelium primamque Epistolam Ioannis Apostoli', *Angelicum* 10/1, 50–110 (who however still considers *Io. eu. tr.* 1–54 as a unit and dates them to 413, starting at the beginning of Lent until 23 November). The identification of the more specific series of *Io. eu. tr.* 1–16, alternating with Psalms and the commentary on John's letter was made by Le Landais, M., (1953), 'Deux années de prédication de saint Augustin. Introduction à la lecture de l'In Ioannem', in Rondet-Le Landais-Couturier (1953), 7–95. Then, La Bonnardière (1965), 19–126 refined the distinction of three groups within the whole set, *Io. eu. tr.* 1–54 being preached in two separate series, 1–16 and 17–54, and 55–124 dictated. She also situated the series 1–16 before 411 against previous studies (at 19–53), a dating then confirmed by Berrouard (1971), 107–119. *Io. eu. tr.* 20–22, however, have been shown to belong to a separate group of sermons (see Berrouard, *BA* 72 (1977), 12–18 reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 81–84, and Berrouard (1971), 119–121). For the alternance of the series with Psalms, see the charts in Le Landais (1953), 15–26 reproduced by Harmless (2014), 289–290. For the dating of *Io. eu. tr.* 17–19 and 23–54 to 414–415 as part of a separate series, see Chapter 2 note 139. For *Io. eu. tr.* 55–124, dictated starting in autumn 419, see Berrouard, M.-F., *BA* 74A (1993), 9–49 (reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 177–194). For a critical overview of scholarship on the whole series of homilies on John see Milewski, D.J., (2002), 'Augustine's 124 Tractates on the Gospel of John: The *Status Quaestionis* and the State of Neglect', *AugStud* 33/1, 61–77. On *Ep. Io. tr.* see Zarb (1933), 61–69; Poque, S., (1964), 'Les lectures liturgiques de l'octave pascalle à Hippone d'après les traités de saint Augustin sur la 1<sup>ère</sup> Épître de saint Jean', *RBen* 74/3–4, 217–241 and the more recent overviews of Rettig, J., *FOC* 92 (1995), 98–100; Dideberg, D., (2002), 'Epistolam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus decem', *AL* 2, fasc. 7/8, 1064–1070; Moutain, J.W., *BA* 76 (2008), 7–15 and 435–436; Margoni-Kögler (2010), 119–125 and 568–574.

27 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 7, 6. Le Landais (1953), 68 n. 101 and La Bonnardière (1965), 47 n. 4 provide an overview of earlier studies attempting to identify this feast.

the “*dies sanguinis*” in honour of Cybele and Attis, which was held on 24 March: 407 is the only year within the range 405–411 when 24 March fell on a Sunday.<sup>28</sup>

On this basis, La Bonnardière argued that the series, started in early December 406, was paused in mid-January 407, until 24 March 407, when Augustine would have resumed, with *Io. eu. tr.* 7, coinciding with the first Sunday of Lent. Thus, she situated the calls to catechumens in the week preceding Holy week, perhaps Tuesday 2 April (*Io. eu. tr.* 10), Sunday 7 April, the last Sunday of Lent (*Io. eu. tr.* 11), and Tuesday 9 April of Holy week (*Io. eu. tr.* 12), with *Io. eu. tr.* 13–16 following only after the Easter Octave.<sup>29</sup> This hypothesis would mean that Augustine still called for the enrolment of catechumens only a few days before Easter, falling on 14 April 407. La Bonnardière’s hypothesis agrees with other scholars who similarly situated the series close to Easter, because of the exhortations to catechumens in connection to the coming of Easter.<sup>30</sup> Zarb, in particular, situated the sermons *Io. eu. tr.* 1–12, in the two weeks preceding Palm Sunday.<sup>31</sup> Soon after the publication of La Bonnardière’s investigation, however, Poque challenged this dating. She noted that the reference to the pagan feast does not obviously relate to the “*dies sanguinis*”, and argued in particular that it would be most unlikely for Augustine to call catechumens to baptism so close to Easter, because of Augustine’s emphasis on the necessity of a proper ritual preparation.<sup>32</sup> Poque first highlighted that the references to the coming of Easter are generic and cannot provide evidence for the fact that Easter is particularly near.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the period of fasting and ascetic practices provided by Lent, seems to imply that catechumens enrolled at the beginning of Lent rather than towards the end.<sup>34</sup> Poque was also inclined to situate the calls at the beginning of Lent on the basis of a strict distinction between the terms *catechu-*

28 La Bonnardière (1965), 43–53.

29 La Bonnardière (1965), 51–53.

30 Huyben, J., (1930), ‘De sermoenen over het Evangelie van Johannes. Bijdrage tot de chronologie van Augustinus’ werken’, *Miscellanea augustiniana* (Rotterdam), 256–274 at 260 and 269; Zarb (1933), 61 and 102.

31 Zarb (1933), 60–61, with *Io. eu. tr.* 12 on Monday after Palm Sunday. Zarb did not take into account the preaching on Gradual Psalms and placed interruptions in the series on two consecutive Saturdays (before the 5th Sunday of Lent and before Palm Sunday), when the *traditio* and *redditio* ceremonies of the Lord’s Prayer would have taken place (on the uncertain dating of these ceremonies, however, see further discussion in this chapter).

32 Le Landais (1953), 68–72 had already argued against the identification of the “*dies sanguinis*” with cult to Cybele and Attis. While accepting La Bonnardière’s dating hypotheses for the series of *Io. eu. tr.* 1–12, Berrouard also rejected the identification of the feast, see *BA* 71 (1969), 29–36 (reprinted in Berrouard (2004), 22–27); Berrouard (1971), 111.

33 Poque (1971), 175–177.

34 Poque (1971), 179 quoting in particular Augustine, *Ep.* 54; *F. et op.* 6.8–9 and S. 210.

*menus* and *competens*, arguing that Augustine would not focus on *catechumeni* during Lent but only on *competentes*. Finally, she also noted that other fourth- and fifth-century sources, in particular Egeria, situate the enrolment at the beginning of Lent.<sup>35</sup> On the basis of these assumptions on the organisation of the baptismal preparation, while agreeing with the broader dating in 406–407, Poque suggested an alternative calendar, with *Io. eu. tr.* 11 falling on the first Sunday of Lent (3 March 407) and *Io. eu. tr.* 10 and 12 respectively on the preceding Sunday and in the week following the beginning of Lent.<sup>36</sup> Beyond the specific dating of this preaching series, Poque's dating more broadly fleshes out the assumptions made in a range of studies on Augustine's catechuminate, which similarly situate the calls at the beginning of Lent.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, while both La Bonnardi re and Poque—as well as Berrouard—agree with a dating of the series in 406–407, albeit for different reasons, there remains great uncertainty about the specific dating of each sermon.<sup>38</sup> The overview of the issues of dating shows that both Poque and La Bonnardi re's hypotheses are plausible.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, it appears clearly that Poque's dating—as that of Zarb before her—is heavily influenced by her views on the organisation of the baptismal preparation, which, however, is far from providing a trust-

35 Poque (1971), 179–182.

36 Poque (1971), 183–187. At 170–173, Poque also questions the dating of *In Ps.* 127 (the last Augustine preached before he paused to resume with *Io. eu. tr.* 7) to 14 January, based on the fact that it was preached for a certain Felix. Instead of identifying the saint with Felix of Nola, whose feast is on that day, she suggests Felix and the other martyrs of Abitinae (12 February).

37 Roetzer (1930), 148; Busch (1938), 430; Monachino (1947), 171; Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 22–23; Cavallotto (1996), 174–175; Harmless (2014), 275–283 (mentioning and agreeing with Poque's dating hypothesis). Brons (2017), 123 only states that the specific time of enrolment is unknown. Margoni-K gler (2010), 569–577 and 584–586 while criticising Poque's hypothesis, broadly follows it, setting the sermons at the beginning of Lent.

38 Berrouard (1971), 107–119 provides a number of arguments to reinforce the dating in 406–407, but these are often based on conjectures and arguments from silence. For Margoni-K gler (2010), 572 (ignoring Berrouard's arguments), the rejection of the identification of the pagan feast, which was La Bonnardi re's main argument, more broadly reopens the issue of the dating.

39 Poque's calendar reduces the gap between *In Ps.* 127 (placed on 13 February instead of 14 January) and *Io. eu. tr.* 7 (placed on 17 February instead of 24 March) to about a month, but, as rightly noted by Margoni-K gler (2010), 572–573 it creates a significant gap of more than a month between *Io. eu. tr.* 12 (preached in early March 407 according to Poque) and *Ep. Io. tr.* (preached during Easter week, 14–21 April), which seems at odds with the rest of the evidence, particularly because Augustine states that he briefly interrupted preaching on the Gospel only to follow customary readings of solemn days before Easter (*Ep. Io. tr.* 1, prologue).

worthy guide for dating sermons. In fact, nothing in Augustine's evidence precludes calls to catechumens late in Lent. While Poque accurately noted that Augustine's emphasises the necessity of a proper preparation and sees Lent as the most fitting time, Augustine's ideal goals need not to strictly match the evidence available in sermons. Moreover, although there is a clear technical distinction in Augustine between *catechumenus* and *competens*, which means that Augustine's addresses to *catechumeni* in these sermons are not generic exhortations to candidates already enrolled but calls for enrolment, this does not imply that such calls had to take place only at the beginning of Lent. On the basis of the content of these sermons alone, which urge to baptism and proclaim the remission of sins, without providing specific details enabling to situate the ceremonies, there is no way to say whether they were preached at the beginning of Lent or closer to Easter.

Outside this specific series, Sermon 132, which mentions that Easter is nearing (*"ecce Pascha"*), provides a similar case: it has been dated to the beginning of Lent by Poque, while it is placed shortly before Easter by Mohrmann and Hill because of its reference to the feast.<sup>40</sup> As noted by Margoni-Kögler, the mention of Easter points to the whole Easter period including Lent and it cannot provide clues about the specific time of preaching, although the mention of ongoing teaching perhaps hints at the fact that Lent had begun.<sup>41</sup> Another example is Sermon 352, preached as an improvised explanation of Psalm 51, 9, sung by mistake by the reader that day.<sup>42</sup> The reference of the psalm to penance was particularly fitting as Augustine preached in the period preceding Easter, particularly addressing *competentes*.<sup>43</sup> Augustine recalled the three main types of penance: pre-baptismal, daily and for grave sins, and addressed *competentes* directly:

40 Poque, *sc* 16 (1966), 22–23; Mohrmann, C., (1948), *Sint Augustinus. Preken voor het volk handelende over de Heilige Schrift et het eigen van de tijd* (Utrecht), 239; Hill, *WSA* 111/4 (1991), 325 and 328 n. 1 suggests that catechumens called would be baptised at Pentecost. Kunzelmann, A., (1931), 'Die Chronologie der Sermones des hl. Augustinus', in *MA* 11 (Rome), 417–520, at 427 situates it during Lent without precision. Similarly, *Io. eu. tr.* 44, S. 136A, S. 136B are of uncertain dating although probably to be situated within Lent.

41 Augustine, S. 132, 1; Margoni-Kögler (2010), 87.

42 Augustine, S. 352, 1.1. On this sermon, with a critical edition, see Dolbeau, F., (2019), 'Une instruction d'Augustin sur la pénitence. Édition critique du sermon 352', *RBen* 129/1 (2019), 5–70. Dolbeau clears the remaining doubts about the authenticity.

43 Augustine, S. 352, 1.1: "*Dicamus aliquid de utilitate paenitentiae, praesertim quia et dies iam sanctus anniversarius imminet*" (Dolbeau (2019), 36).

So in the meantime, right now, if there happen to be any present of the group who are preparing to be baptised—I think, you see, they are paying all the keener attention to the word, the closer they are to being pardoned—these are the ones I am first addressing a few words to, so that they may lift up their spirits in hope.<sup>44</sup>

For Dolbeau, the fact that Augustine shows little knowledge of the *competentes* in the audience means that he was preaching outside Hippo, at the beginning of Lent, as he was returning home after a trip to Carthage.<sup>45</sup> However, it remains possible that this sermon was preached when Augustine was already back in Hippo. He could have addressed *competentes* only casually and they were not necessarily known to him personally—as he admits in the case of Curma. The sermon was preached in or around Lent at an uncertain time (perhaps, but not necessarily on Sunday)<sup>46</sup> in connection to the enrolment, since it mentions the candidates' ongoing efforts to prepare for baptism, the pledge that they have to make, and employs the technical term *competens* twice, thus clearly having them in mind as his target audience.<sup>47</sup> Before turning to the other types of penance, Augustine explains—on the basis of a baptismal interpretation of key biblical passages, notably resorting to typological exegesis with the famous analogy of the crossing of the Red Sea—that repentance is an essential part of

44 Augustine, S. 352, 1.2: "*Ergo interim nunc, si qui forte adsunt ex eo numero, qui baptizari disponunt—credimus enim eos adesse tanto ad verbum studiosius, quanto ad indulgentiam vicinius—, hos primum paucis alloquimur, ut erigant mentes in spem*" (Dolbeau (2019), 38; Hill, WSA 111/10 (1995), 138).

45 Dolbeau (2009), 274–275; Dolbeau (2019), 8–9 and 13–16. Dolbeau argues that the sermon probably follows the next day after Augustine's *Util. ieiun.*; the two form a group of sermons with S. Dolbeau 2 (= 359B) in Possidius, *Indiculus* x<sup>6</sup> 54–55–56; they may also relate to other sermons in the Mayence-Lorsch collections preached in winter 403–404 in Carthage and during the following trip returning to Hippo, in particular S. 159B (= Dolbeau 21). See also Dolbeau (2005), 31–33, 61–64 and for alternative hypotheses: Mühlenberg, E., (2002), 'Wenn Augustin die Bibel unvorbereitet auslegt. Augustins Sermo 352', in Bultmann, C., Dietrich, W., Levin, C., (eds.), (2002), *Vergegenwärtigung des Alten Testaments. Beiträge zur biblischen Hermeneutik. Festschrift für Rudolf Smend zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen), 196–210; Partoens, G., (2012), 'An Anti-Donatist Sermon on Fasting: Augustine's *De utilitate ieiunii*. A New Critical Edition with Philological Introduction', *SEJG* 51, 151–194, esp. 154–156 and 172–177 (dating the sermon to 406–411).

46 For Dolbeau (2019), 7 the improvised nature of the sermon might suggest that it was given on a weekday.

47 Augustine, S. 352, 1.2: "*Novum hominem nasciturum iam voto concipiant*"; 1.6: "*Respiciat ergo negotium suum competiturus baptismum, quem alloqui coeperam*"; 2.7: "*Illā prima competentium est et ad baptismum venire sitientium: hanc de scripturis sanctis ostendi*" (Dolbeau (2019), 39, 53, 57).



the initiation process and that *competentes* need not to fear for past sins, since they will be washed away in baptism.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the state of the evidence about the enrolment procedure in Hippo remains fragmentary. Augustine's references to the ritual in general are too imprecise to allow for the reconstruction of a specific calendar. The fact that the bishop made calls in sermons does not necessarily mean that no catechumens had enrolled before he preached.<sup>49</sup> The only evidence provided in the sermons on John is that the main call most probably happened on a Sunday and that Augustine performed at least three different calls.<sup>50</sup> This fact shows that in Hippo—and probably elsewhere—the admission of candidates was not restricted to a single day but that they were allowed to enter the preparation over a longer period.<sup>51</sup> The practice of a wider admission window is further suggested by the fact that individuals from the nearby countryside could travel to receive baptism in Hippo, as was the case of Curma, sent by the local clergy of Thullium, a small *municipium* in the diocese of Hippo.<sup>52</sup> The presence of foreign candidates, who go home after the Easter Octave, is further attested in a sermon of Augustine bidding farewell to neophytes on that day: "Mercy, my brothers and sisters, all of you who are going to go home, and from now on

48 Augustine, *S.* 352, 1.2–2.7; see an analysis in Dolbeau (2019), 9–12.

49 Poque (1971), 175–179, emphasising a slight change in vocabulary between *Io. eu. tr.* 10, 11 and 12 argues that *Io. eu. tr.* 10 constituted the first call while *Io. eu. tr.* 12, with the phrase "still catechumens (*adhuc catechumeni*)", would show that some had enrolled since the first call. This is a weak argument since *adhuc* is frequently connected to *catechumenus* by Augustine: catechumens are "still" such in contrast to the baptised (see *Conf.* 11, 3.6; *Ep.* 36, 14.32; *Ep.* 151, 14; *Io. eu. tr.* 13, 7; *In Ps.* 50, 1; *S.* 16A (= Denis 20), 6; *S.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 3). Little can be inferred from these slight changes in the wording of Augustine's calls (this applies as well to Poque's analysis of *S.* 352 (at 181–182), which in my opinion relies too heavily on a strict distinction of terminology).

50 If one assumes that Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 12, 1 ("*Meminit autem caritas vestra dominico praeterito, quantum dominus adiuvare dignatus est, disseruisse nos de spiritali regeneratione*", Willems, *CCL* 36 (1954), 120) is referring to *Io. eu. tr.* 11. For the calls: *Io. eu. tr.* 10, 11; 11, 3–9; 12, 2–3.

51 In Northern Italy, sermons of Maximus of Turin inviting catechumens to baptism suggest that the ceremony began around the feast of Epiphany but extended into Lent (*S.* 13, 1; 65, 1–2; 91, 2; 111, 3). Ambrose's remarks about the lack of success of his call to baptism at Epiphany, and Peter Chrysologus' bitter remarks about the lack of time for preparation may further suggest that the time for the inscription was extended into Lent, see Ambrose *In Lucam* IV, 76; Peter Chrysologus *S.* 58, 1 and 61, 1. In the East in the fourth century, the canon 45 of Laodicea forbids admission of candidates for baptism after the second week of Lent.

52 See Chapter 3, 3.2 (pp. 169–172) discussing Curma's story (Augustine, *Cur. mort.* 12, 15). On the *territorium* of Hippo: Lancel (1999b), 213–216.

we shall scarcely ever see each other, except on particular feast days—mercy is what you must practise, because sins abound”.<sup>53</sup> As underlined by Poque, in view of the correspondence of Lent with the baptismal preparation as a period of penance and ascetical practices which had great significance for Augustine’s community, and knowing what is practised elsewhere, it is likely that enrolment coincided in Hippo with the beginning of Lent. The study of Augustine’s evidence, however, shows that no specific and restrictive date for enrolment emerges, the bishop clearly calling for enrolment over an extended period and candidates entering the preparation progressively.

### 1.2 The Selection Process

Other features of the enrolment, notably highlighted by Egeria and related to each other, are the examination of candidates, separated by gender, with godfathers and godmothers acting as respective witnesses.<sup>54</sup> In Augustine’s community, godparents probably had an important role to play in the process, but unfortunately there is no mention of them in relation to the admission ceremony.<sup>55</sup> The admission process implies the need for witnesses: the candidates gathered were from various backgrounds and could be unknown to the clergy.<sup>56</sup> Dossey has suggested that candidates to baptism such as Curma may have needed a sort of recommendation letter, although there is no evidence about this practice in Augustine.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 1, Augustine’s *Confessiones* mention a letter that he sent as a catechumen to Ambrose in connection to the admission to prepare for baptism.<sup>58</sup> Thus, candidates—perhaps only in specific cases as for prominent converts from Manichaeism—may have been required to write a letter of renunciation of their former beliefs. The late antique pseudo-Augustinian *Commonitorium* mentions the need of a let-

53 Augustine, S. 259, 4: “*Misericordiam, fratres mei, omnes qui ituri estis ad domos vestras, et ex hoc vix nos videbimus, nisi per aliquam solemnitatem, misericordiam operamini, quia abundant peccata*” (PL 38 (1841), 1199; Hill, WSA 111/7 (1993), 180 adapted). See Poque, SC 16 (1966), 24; Brons (2017), 117 n. 2.

54 Egeria, *Itinerarium* 45.

55 See Dujarier (1962) on the origins of godparenthood in the second and third centuries (for Africa see 217–246, and for Augustine briefly 40–42); for studies including the later periods see Lynch (1986), 83–140 and 285–332; Jussen, B., (1991), *Patenschaft und Adoption im frühen Mittelalter. Künstliche Verwandtschaft als soziale Praxis* (Göttingen), 133–167 (discussing in particular the growing significance of godparents, both before and after baptism, brought by the spread of infant baptism).

56 As is stated in Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15.

57 Dossey (2010), 150.

58 See Chapter 1, pp. 73–74.

ter and of sponsors recommending former Manichaeans to be admitted.<sup>59</sup> As an external guarantee, and beyond specific cases, witnesses to the behaviour of candidates may have proved sufficient. The separation of sexes is also likely in Hippo, although the only available evidence is the account in the 22nd book of the *De civitate Dei* about the aristocrat Innocentia who waits for the first baptised woman to exit from the women's side of the baptistery in order to be healed.<sup>60</sup> The separation is understandable because of the full nudity at baptism, but it may well have been a rule for the whole set of rituals of preparation, admission included. Despite the lack of available evidence, such a separation would fit well with the reforms promoted by Aurelius of Carthage, notably the separation of sexes in Church assemblies.<sup>61</sup>

Besides these features, Augustine gives further clues about the exact nature and organisation of the admission to prepare for baptism in two texts: the treatise *De fide et operibus*, containing an overview of the baptismal preparation and discussing the ideal requirements set for the admission of candidates, and Sermon 216, preached to *competentes* and providing us with evidence on the rituals accompanying the process. In the sixth chapter of the *De fide et operibus*, Augustine presents the recommended practice: catechumens who are not in danger of death—in that case baptism is granted without preparation—are asked to go through a time of teaching and ritual initiation, when they will hear how they should lead their lives as *fideles*.<sup>62</sup> Thus, for Augustine, the time preceding baptism is particularly appropriate to receive catechesis on Christian morals, change one's conduct and repent from past sins. The *De fide et operibus*, written in 412–413 to refute some unknown opponents who argued that strict control on behaviour at admission was not needed, offers rare evidence on a set of rules of admission to be followed. It should be underlined from the start that the polemical context of the treatise, which attempts to impose these rules, demonstrates that such rules were not shared by all. Augustine's treatise only offers a partial testimony to the potential practices of the time, showing that there were alternative, milder views.<sup>63</sup> Because of the lack of any

59 *Commonitorium Augustini quod fertur* (Zycha, CSEL 25/2 (1892), 979–982).

60 Augustine, *Ciu.* XXII, 8.4: “Admonetur in somnis propinquante Pascha, ut in parte feminarum observanti ad baptisterium, quaecumque illi baptizata primitus occurrisset, signaret ei locum signo Christi” (Dombart-Kalb, CCL 48 (1955), 818).

61 Augustine, *Conf.* III, 3.5; S. 359B (= Dolbeau 2), 5; see Chapter 1 note 80.

62 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9: “Si autem salvus petit spatiumque discendi est, quod aliud opportunius tempus reperiri potest, quo audiat, quemadmodum fidelis fieri ac vivere debeat, quam illud, cum adtentiore animo atque ipsa religione suspenso saluberrimae fidei sacramentum petit?” (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 44).

63 On the treatise, and in particular its rules of admission, see Pignot (2018).

other preserved evidence, however, our focus is bound to be on what Augustine practised and recommended.

The rules of admission promoted in the *De fide et operibus* were clearly intended for the admission to the baptismal preparation, as shown by the emphasis on *competentes*, with frequent mentions of the learning of the creed and the catechesis (*catechismi*) received by the candidates.<sup>64</sup> In Chapter 2, I have argued that these rules may have also been applied by Augustine at the entrance into the catechumenate, as attested notably in the *Apostolic Tradition* and the so-called canons of Elvira.<sup>65</sup> Both sources, however, also hint at a further examination prior to the preparation for baptism: the *Apostolic Tradition* mentions an enquiry on the candidate's conduct, while a number of canons of Elvira set a required length of catechumenate—that could extend until imminent death—before candidates can be admitted to baptism, depending on the gravity of their previous sinful behaviour.<sup>66</sup> For Augustine's Africa as well—notwithstanding the fact that evidence is scarce to fully understand how the admission process was regulated—it seems that candidates were twice examined, first as they entered the catechumenate, then when they decided to ask for baptism, although Augustine, in the *De fide et operibus*, puts particular emphasis on this latter examination, suggesting that it might have been more strict and detailed.

As in the *Apostolic Tradition* and the so-called canons of Elvira, rules of admission in the *De fide et operibus* include a number of prohibited professions: prostitutes, dancers, actors, gladiators, and in general all those working in professions associated with public shows who do not accept to change profession are excluded, on the basis of Paul's listing of sinners who shall not enter the kingdom of God (Gal 5, 19–21 and 1 Cor 5, 10–11 and 6, 9–10).<sup>67</sup> The rule that indi-

64 Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33 and 19, 35.

65 *Apostolic Tradition* 16 (Bausi (2011), §12); canons 44, 62 (see Chapter 2 note 56 for discussion and bibliography).

66 *Apostolic Tradition* 20 (Bausi (2011), §16); canons 4 (three years of catechumenate for *flamines*), 10/11 (five years for remarried wives of catechumens), 68 (until imminent death for women carrying out abortion on babies conceived in adultery), 73 (until imminent death for denouncers). Further “canons of Elvira” regulating the baptism of catechumens are c. 37 (possessed individuals admitted to baptism only just before death), 38 (baptism can be conferred by laymen in case of emergency), 39 (pagans allowed to become catechumens in emergency), 42 (two years are the regular length of catechumenate), 45 (baptism should be granted to catechumens who have not attended church for a long time, provided that they have witnesses to demonstrate their commitment), 48 (paying for baptism is prohibited), 59 (pagan sacrifice is prohibited), 77 (baptism can be conferred by a deacon in emergency).

67 Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33 (prostitutes, actors and all professions related to public shows);

viduals working in spectacles have to abandon their profession in order to seek baptism—already found in Tertullian's *De spectaculis*—seems to have been promoted more widely in late antique Africa as clear from a canon of the council of Carthage held the 16th of June 401.<sup>68</sup> This was more broadly based on the idea that the enduring practice of shows in Late Antiquity was incompatible with Christianity.<sup>69</sup> As Lim puts it: “the rite of baptism became a central feature in defining the relationship between the Christian church and the theater and its personnel.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, besides the already mentioned late antique sources, this rule finds further parallels elsewhere.

Notably, the earliest imperial law regarding actors and Christianity, dating from 371 (or perhaps already 367), legislates on the impact of conversion: because of the incompatibility of the profession with Christianity and the risk that actors abandon their obligations by seeking baptism, it restricts the right for actors to be freed from their *munus* only if they are baptised in emergency and subsequently recover.<sup>71</sup> Other laws from 380 and 381 show an interesting evolution in the emperors' attitude, still defending the interests of shows but now more open to Christian rules: they state that actresses are allowed to abandon their profession when they convert to Christianity but that if they are found living an unfitting life while being Christian they shall be returned to their former profession and not be freed from it until old age.<sup>72</sup> Thus con-

15, 25 and 21, 37 (prostitutes); 27, 49 (dancers). This relates to a broader negative judgment of these professions, see Brabant, O., (1971), ‘Classes et professions “maudites” chez saint Augustin d'après les *Enarrationes in Psalmos*’, *REAug* 17, 69–81. On infamous and prohibited professions see Neri, V., (1998), *I marginali nell'Occidente tardoantico. Poveri, ‘infames’, e criminali nella nascente società cristiana* (Bari), esp. 197–286.

68 Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 4; *Registri Ecclesiae Carthaginensis Excerpta*, c. 63: “*Et de his etiam petendum, ut si quis ex qualibet ludica arte ad christianitatis gratiam venire voluerit, ac liber ab illa macula permanere, non eum liceat a quoquam iterum ad eadem exercenda reduci vel cogi*” (Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974), 197–198). On the baptism of actors, see as well *Breviarium Hipponense*, c. 33 = *Registri Ecclesiae Carthaginensis Excerpta*, c. 45b = Ferrandus of Carthage, *Breviarium canonum*, c. 170.

69 See evidence on the issues around the baptism of stage performers in Lim, R., (2003), ‘Converting the Un-Christianizable. The Baptism of Stage Performers in Late Antiquity’, in Mills-Grafton (2003), 84–126. This notably includes a number of martyrdom accounts narrating the baptism of stage performers. On Christianity and shows more generally: Lugaresi, L., (2008), *Il teatro di Dio. Il problema degli spettacoli nel cristianesimo antico (II–IV secolo)* (Brescia).

70 Lim (2003), 91.

71 *Codex Theodosianus* xv, 7.1: “*Scaenici et scaenicae, qui in ultimo vitae ac necessitate cogente interitus imminens ad dei summi sacramenta properarunt, si fortassis evaserint, nulla posthac in theatralis spectacula conventionem revocentur*” (Mommesen-Meyer (1905), I.2, 821).

72 See *Codex Theodosianus* xv, 7.4 (380AD), 7.8 (381AD) and 7.9 (381AD). For discussions of

verting to Christianity freed actresses from their *munus*, and the infamous condition going with it, but there still was the possibility that they would be recalled to their former condition if they failed to show a real change of conduct after converting to Christianity. These laws are to be set in the context of conflicting interests between churches and organisers of shows. In fact, there is evidence—notably in a letter, perhaps from early fifth-century Africa, and in a sermon of John Chrysostom—that the freedom granted to professionals abandoning shows to convert to Christianity was questioned by local authorities.<sup>73</sup>

These laws and disputes show that Augustine's rules can be set in a wider context: the enforcement of pre-baptismal admission rules was clearly promoted more widely in churches in the second half of the fourth century at the latest, imperial laws witnessing to this process and showing how the state attempted to find compromises between the interests of the professions and the requirements of churches.

Beyond specific professions, rules of admission pertained to one's relationships and sexuality.<sup>74</sup> In line with the Lenten discipline to be observed by the wider congregation, Augustine connects the baptismal preparation to sexual prohibitions: all married candidates who have given their names are required to

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these laws and their context: French, D.R., (1985), *Christian Emperors and Pagan Spectacles. The Secularization of the ludi AD 382–525* (University of California, Berkeley CA, PhD. Thesis), 182–192; Neri (1998), 247–250; Soler, E., (2009), 'La législation impériale *De scaenicis* dans le Code Théodosien (xv, 7)', in Crogiez-Pétrequin, S., Jaillette, P., (eds.), (2009), *Le Code Théodosien: diversité des approches et nouvelles perspectives* (Rome), 241–258, esp. 244–255. Soler suggests that abandoning one's profession was required at the time of asking for baptism, but it remains possible that it was enforced (or at least sought) when candidates entered the catechumenate.

73 The letter, found in a single manuscript (Vatican City, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Pal. lat. 829, f. 114<sup>r</sup> from the 8th–9th centuries) among a few letters copied after Orosius' History, asks for a young man to be freed from the *munus* of shows since he has been baptised. It clearly provides an example of local authorities being reluctant to apply these rulings (see Lepelley, C., (1989), 'Trois documents méconnus sur l'histoire sociale et religieuse de l'Afrique romaine tardive, retrouvés parmi les *spuria* de Sulpice Sévère', *Antiquités africaines* 25, 235–262, esp. 258–261). John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum* 67, 3 (PG 58 (1860), 636–637) narrates about failed attempts of the prefect in Antioch to bring back an actress who had converted to Christianity and now lived in a monastery. Later, actors abandoning their profession enjoyed greater protection as Roman law evolved, see an overview in Beaucamp, J., (1990), *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4<sup>e</sup>–7<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 1. *Le droit impérial* (Paris), 130–132.

74 *Apostolic Tradition* 16 grants admission only to slave concubines who have raised children and remain faithful to their partner, while men must marry. The "canons of Elvira" 10/11 and 68 also legislate on these aspects (see note 66).

abstain from sexual relationships—a rule shared with his opponents—and to fast and receive exorcisms.<sup>75</sup> The examination on sexual practices and marriage was essential to the admission process in Augustine's community, as particularly shown by the *De fide et operibus*—this issue was at the core of the dispute with his opponents.<sup>76</sup> In this treatise, Augustine rejects in principle the admission to baptism of remarried individuals, who are considered adulterers. This rule is based on the interpretation of Scripture, and the main relevant passages about marriage are Matthew's Gospel about Jesus' prohibition of divorce and remarriage, except on account of fornication (Mt 5, 31–32 and Mt 19, 9) and Paul's statement against the remarriage of women (1 Cor 7, 10–11). Augustine only lists few exceptions to this rule, in cases where the interpretation of Scripture allows it. Repudiated concubines who vow not to remarry may be admitted, as well as men who have repudiated their adulterous spouse and remarried. Those, however, who publicly admit unlawful relationships—i.e. who have divorced and remarried for any other reason than their partner's adultery—and refuse to break their relationship in order to be baptised, should be rejected.<sup>77</sup> Later, in his treatise *De adulterinis coniugiis*, dated to 419–120, Augustine rejects the admission of repudiated concubines and more broadly of any remarried individual.<sup>78</sup> These are considered as adulterers and cannot be baptised, except in case of emergency.<sup>79</sup> Augustine's views, however, as those of his contemporaries, were still in the making and rules for remarriage were a debated topic—as notably shown by the controversy of the *De fide et operibus*.<sup>80</sup> Augustine often

75 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 8: "[...] *quo sine dubio non admitterentur, si per ipsos dies, quibus eandem gratiam percepturi suis nominibus datis abstinentia, ieiuniis exorcismisque purgantur, cum suis legitimis et veris uxoribus se concubituros profiterentur atque huius reis; quamvis alio tempore licitae, paucis ipsis sollemnibus diebus nullam continentiam servaturos*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 43). In S. 210, 7.9, Augustine recommends abstinence from sex to the whole assembly as well.

76 Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33 and 19, 35.

77 Augustine, *F. et op.* 19, 35: "*De concubina quoque, si professa fuerit nullum se alium cognituram, etiamsi ab illo cui subdita est dimittatur, merito dubitatur, utrum ad percipiendum baptismum non debeat admitti. Quisquis etiam uxorem in adulterio deprehensam dimiserit et aliam duxerit, non videtur aequandus eis, qui excepta causa adulterii dimittunt et ducunt; et in ipsis divinis sententiis ita obscurum est, utrum et iste, cui quidem sine dubio adulteram licet dimittere, adulter tamen habeatur, si alteram duxerit, ut, quantum existimo, venialiter ibi quisque fallatur*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 81). Augustine's concubine was perhaps in such a position (see *Conf.* VI, 15.25).

78 Augustine, *Adult. coniug.* 11, 16.16.

79 Augustine, *Adult. coniug.* 1, 28.35.

80 On marriage and divorce in Augustine see Berrouard, M.-F., (1968), 'Saint Augustin et l'indissolubilité du mariage. Évolution de sa pensée', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 5, 139–153; Schmidt, E., (1983), *Le mariage chrétien dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin. Une théolo-*

expressed doubts about marriage and divorce, notably in his *Retractationes*, written towards the end of his life (426–427).<sup>81</sup> More broadly, rules regarding marriage and divorce were progressively defined in Late Antiquity, particularly in canon legislation, and Augustine's treatises were precisely part of this process, actually promoting stricter views on these complex issues.<sup>82</sup>

Beyond the issue of remarriage and the treatise *De fide et operibus*, the enforcement of moral requirements was essential to Augustine as a necessary condition to enrol for baptism, as also indirectly attested in Augustine's letters and sermons addressing catechumens. As we have seen, in his letter to Marcianus, or in preaching to his congregation in Hippo, Augustine relates the inscription to baptism with a radical change of conduct.<sup>83</sup> In his letter to Caecilianus, Augustine asserts that baptism is not incompatible with holding prominent office in the imperial government, thus implying that catechumens holding prominent positions may have postponed baptism to avoid being subject to penance for behaviour potentially unfitting with Christian morals, while Firmus' hesitation to enter the baptismal preparation perhaps similarly relates to such strict rules, Augustine in particular referring to the *concupiscentia* holding him back.<sup>84</sup>

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*gie baptismale de la vie conjugale* (Paris), esp. 63–80, 173–233 and 259–265 (investigating links to baptism); Geest, P. van, (2012), 'Nuptiae', *AL* 4, fasc. 1/2, 243–261; Cereti, G., (2013), *Divorzio, nuove nozze e penitenza nella chiesa primitiva* (Rome), 252–261; Hunter, D., (2017), 'Augustine's Doubts on Divorce: Reconsiderations on Remarriage', *AugStud* 48/1–2, 161–182.

81 Augustine, *Retr.* 1, 19.6; 11, 57; see also *Bon. coniug.* 7, 7; *Adult. coniug.* 1, 25.32. These passages are discussed and Augustine's doubts well highlighted and set in a wider context in Hunter (2017).

82 Reynolds, P.L., (1994), *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden-Boston), 176–177 and 417–418 argued that a "normative Western position", promoted by Jerome and Augustine, was gradually imposed; it should be stressed, however, that Augustine's own views evolved over time. Hunter (2017), 174–181 presents the diverging views of other Latin early Christian writers, in particular Ambrosiaster's, contrasting with Augustine's. On the evolving views on marriage and divorce more broadly at this period see Nautin, P., (1974), 'Divorce et remariage dans la tradition de l'Église latine', *RSR* 62, 7–54; Munier, Ch., (1988), 'L'échec du mariage dans l'Église ancienne', *Revue de droit canonique* 38, 26–40; Bof, R., Leyser, C., (2016), 'Divorce and Remarriage Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Canon Law and Conflict Resolution', in Cooper, K., Leyser, C., (eds.), (2016), *Making Early Medieval Societies* (Cambridge), 155–180, esp. 158–170 (discussing evidence from canon law, notably an African canon prohibiting remarriage of repudiated individuals).

83 Augustine, *Ep.* 258, 5; S. 302 (= 302 + Guelf. 25), 3; S. 335H (= Lambot 26), 3 etc. (see Chapter 3).

84 Augustine, *Ep.* 151, 14; *Ep.* 2\*, 11.



Thus, in Augustine's community, at the time of admission, candidates were asked about their habits and relationships, and were required to demonstrate their readiness to conform their lives to Augustine's moral requirements. In the *De fide et operibus*, Augustine frequently complains that his opponents admitted individuals who openly stated their evil conduct, thus implying that candidates were tested on the basis of their statements.<sup>85</sup> This emphasis on morals and on the control of candidates also suggests that witnesses or godparents may have been called to testify to their good conduct, although no evidence is provided.

### 1.3 *Sermon 216 and the Beginning of the Baptismal Preparation*

The admission and selection of candidates was also the beginning of a specific ritual preparation, for which, it will be suggested, Sermon 216 provides a unique description. In the Maurists' edition, it follows on a series of sermons to *competentes* on the creed (212–215). Possidius' *Indiculus* only mentions three sermons on the creed, which could be Sermons 212, 213 and 215.<sup>86</sup> Concerning Sermon 214, Le Nain de Tillemont, followed by Kattenbusch, De Bruyne and Verbraken, has shown that it was very likely written as a model for priests, who in Africa were first allowed to preach in Augustine's time.<sup>87</sup> Possidius however also records an "*exhortatorius ad competentes tractatus unus*", which has often been identified—despite uncertainties—with our Sermon 216.<sup>88</sup> The sermon,

85 Augustine, *F. et op.* 1.1; 6.8; 16.30; 17.31–32; 18.33; 27.49.

86 Possidius, *Indiculus* x<sup>6</sup>, 175: "*De symbolo tractatus tres*" (Wilmart (1931), 205). The three sermons are transmitted together in the order 215–213–212 in the Wolfenbüttel collection of Augustine's sermons discovered by Morin in the early twentieth century, see Verbraken (1976), 206; Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), xxv.

87 Le Nain de Tillemont, S., (1710), *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*, volume 13, 2nd edition (Paris), note XIV, 965–967 (first edition 1702); Kattenbusch (1894), 52; De Bruyne, D., (1933), 'Notes sur le Psautier de saint Augustin', *RBen* 45, 20–28, at 27–28; Verbraken, P.-P., (1962), 'Le sermon CCXIV de saint Augustin pour la tradition du Symbole', *RBen* 72, 7–21, at 7; Madec, G., (1992), "Augustin prêtre. Quelques notes pour la célébration d'un 16<sup>e</sup> centenaire", in *Mélanges offerts à Jacques Fontaine. De Tertulien aux Mozarabes* (Paris), 185–199 reprinted in Madec, G., (2001), *Lectures augustinienes* (Paris), 59–74, esp. 62–64. Augustine refers to the practice of preparing model sermons and recommends it in *Doctr. chr.* IV, 29.62. It is known that Augustine's predecessor Valerius asked Augustine to preach when he was ordained a priest, going against local tradition (Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 5, 3–5; when ordained, Augustine required some time of preparation before undertaking this task, see *Ep.* 21, 4). Later, this practice became more widespread, particularly thanks to Aurelius of Carthage (see Augustine, *Ep.* 41 and further evidence about priests preaching in S. 20, 5; 137, 13; 223, 2). On priests in Augustine's Africa see Zerfass, A., (2016), 'Presbyter, presbyterium', *AL* 4, fasc. 5/6, 910–914.

88 Possidius, *Indiculus* x<sup>6</sup>, 177 (Wilmart (1931), 206). See the Maurist edition: *Sancti Aurelii*

because of its references to the beginning of the preacher's ministry, was most likely preached by a priest, either by Augustine himself shortly after his ordination in 391, or perhaps prepared by him as a model for priests at an unknown date after 391.<sup>89</sup>

Sermon 216 focuses on the progress in good habits and faith, the fight against the Devil—with the metaphor of the athlete and the presentation of a new pact with God—and the impatience of candidates waiting to be born.<sup>90</sup> It implies a new beginning, opposing the bad life that candidates are abandoning and the new life they now have to lead. They are to be reborn from new parents, God and the Church, and will need constant rebuke of the preacher in order to keep their new vow.<sup>91</sup> The sermon puts particular emphasis on the fight against the Devil connected to a radical change of conduct. This leads the preacher to evoke a ritual examination including exorcisms, providing particularly important and rare evidence on pre-baptismal practices:

What we are doing to you by invoking (*adiurato*) the name of your redeemer, you must complete by thoroughly scrutinising (*scrutatione*) and crushing your hearts. We block the wiles of the ancient and obstinate enemy with prayers to God and with stern rebukes; you must stand up to him with your earnest prayers and contrition of heart, in order to be snatched from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his glory (cf. Col 1, 13). This is now your task, and this your toil. We heap curses (*maledicta*) on him, appropriate to his vile wickedness; it is for you, rather, to join glorious battle with him by turning away from him

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*Hipponensis episcopi operum*, t. 5 (Paris, 1683), 953 (reprinted in *PL* 38 (1841), 1076), followed by Wilmart (1931), 224; Audet (1954), 155; Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 25; Brons (2017), 132. However, the position of this entry in the *Indiculus* between a sermon on the Lord's Prayer and a sermon for the Easter Octave suggests that it might rather refer to a sermon preached just before baptism. Sermon 216 is entitled "*sermo ad competentes*" in the late antique *De alleluia* collection through which it has been transmitted, see on the collection Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), xiv–xvii and on the title Lambot, C., (1947), 'Collection antique de sermons de saint Augustin', *RBén* 57, 89–108 at 97. Unfortunately, a new edition of Sermon 216 is lacking since the seventeenth century.

89 The dating to 391 is already given by the Maurists (*PL* 38 (1841), 1076); another possibility is that the sermon dates from Lent 397, shortly after Augustine became a bishop. Finally, De Bruyne (1933), 28 has suggested that this sermon, like Sermon 214, may have been a model written by Augustine when he was a bishop, although this remains uncertain (Le Nain de Tillemont (1710), article LXI, 151 and note XIV, 966–967, noted the difference in style between the two sermons). For an overview of hypotheses see Verbraken (1976), 105–106.

90 Augustine, *S.* 216, 1–7.

91 Augustine, *S.* 216, 4. 6–10.

and devoutly renouncing him. [...] So amid all these gangs of people vexing and troubling you, put on sackcloth (*cilicio*), and humble your soul with fasting. Humility is rewarded with what pride has been denied. And you indeed, while you were being scrutinised (*scrutaremini*), and that persuader of flight and desertion was being properly rebuked by the terrifying omnipotence of the Trinity, were not actually clothed in sackcloth, but yet your feet were symbolically standing on it. [...] [He] raises the dead, and snatches the possessed from the grip of the spirits of wickedness (cf. Eph 6, 12). From these we have just now found you to be free; we congratulate you, and exhort you to preserve in your hearts the health that is apparent in your bodies.<sup>92</sup>

It is worth underlining that this sermon and the *De fide et operibus* are the only two texts in which Augustine refers to this ritual examination, employing the verb *scrutare* as a technical term in the passive voice—he never uses the term *scrutamen*.<sup>93</sup> Augustine clearly describes a session of exorcism, with invocations to God and curses to the Devil, during which candidates are examined and declared fit on the basis of their physical condition. Although it remains unclear how this examination was conducted, it seems to have been intended to spot signs of demonic presence, such as illness or disruptive behaviour, which could be interpreted as signs of possession.<sup>94</sup> This practice has to be situated in the wider context of the emergence, attested since the third century, of pre-baptismal exorcism both in the East and in the West.<sup>95</sup> At the end of the

92 Augustine, *S.* 216, 6 and 10–11: “*Quod in vobis adiurato vestri redemptoris nomine facimus, hoc vestri cordis scrutatione et contributione complete. Nos precibus ad deum et increpationibus inveterati hostis dolis resistimus: vos votis et vestri cordis contritione persistite, ut eruamini de potestate tenebrarum, et transferamini in regnum claritatis eius. Hoc est nunc opus vestrum, et hic labor vester. Digna in eum nos suis nequitiiis maledicta congerimus: vestra vos potius aversione ac pia renuntiatione gloriosissimum ei certamen indicite. [...] In tantis ergo catervis molestantium induite vos cilicio, et humiliate in ieiunio animam vestram. Redditur humilitati quod superbiae denegatum est. Et vos quidem cum scrutaremini, atque ipsius fugae ac desertionis persuasor in trinitatis tremendae omnipotentia debite increparetur; non estis induti cilicio: sed tamen vestri pedes in eodem mystice constiterunt. [...] suscitatur mortuos, atque nequitiae spiritibus possessos et captos eripit. A quibus quia vos nunc immunes esse probavimus; gratulantes vobis admonemus vos, ut sanitas quae apparuit in vestro corpore, haec in vestris cordibus conservetur*” (PL 38 (1841), 1080 and 1082; Hill, WSA 111/7 (1993), 171 and 174).

93 Augustine, *S.* 216, 6 and 10; *F. et op.* 6, 9 (*scrutantur*).

94 See hypotheses in Dondeyne (1932), 16; Capelle (1933), 148; Busch (1938), 435, all recorded in Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 27 and Harmless (2014), 312.

95 On possession, and particularly on the emergence of pre-baptismal exorcism, see: Dölger

ritual described by Augustine, the candidates are found free from possession and thus ready to prepare for their birth to a new life. There is a strong link, as in other early Christian sources, between possession and sin: exorcisms contribute to the fight against sin and open the way for a radical change of conduct. The ritual includes standing on the *cilicium* (goatskin), probably in allusion to the tunics, representing sin, worn by Adam in Gn 3, 21. This has a symbolic meaning, representing penance and the crushing of past sins.<sup>96</sup> The preacher makes a particularly strong connection between the outward ritual (the exorcism and the examination of the bodies), and the inward transformation required from candidates, in line with the moral requirements set in the *De fide et operibus*.

The ritual attested in Sermon 216 is generally described by scholars as a scrutiny, based on the words *scrutinium* or *scrutamēn*, and connected to other contemporary evidence in an attempt to reconstruct the precise organisation of initiation rituals. Quasten has shown that Theodore of Mopsuestia's catecheses provide evidence for two sessions of exorcism barefoot on goatskins, one following the enrolment to prepare for baptism and an examination of conduct, and the other at a ceremony of renunciation of the Devil, shortly before baptism.<sup>97</sup> The same session of exorcism is described by Narsai in mid-fifth-century Edessa.<sup>98</sup> For Africa, the next two chapters will show that both the sermons

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(1909), 17–43 and 63–130; Thraede (1969) 76–100; Nicolotti, A., (2011), *Esorcismo cristiano e possessione diabolica tra II e III secolo* (Turnhout), 63–66 and 91–101.

96 Busch (1938), 438–440; Quasten, J., (1942), 'Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Exorcism of the Cilicium', *HTHR* 35/3, 209–219 at 218–219 (a slightly reworked and translated version is Quasten, J., (1956), 'Ein Taufexorcismus bei Augustinus', *REAug* 2, 101–108); Harmless (2014), 311 (with further references in Augustine). Dölger (1909), 114–115 evokes possible connections to pre-Christian lustration rites.

97 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Hom. Cat.* 12, 1. 22–26 and *Hom. Cat.* 13 (Tonneau, R., Devreesse, R., (1949), *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*, Vatican City, 323, 359–365 and 367–401), discussed in Quasten (1942), 209–213 (Quasten (1956), 102–105), see also Saxer (1988), 267–281; Gavrilyuk (2007), 230–233 and 244–252. On initiation and Theodore's catecheses more broadly, see Schwartz (2013).

98 Narsai of Edessa, *Homily* 22 (B), see a discussion in Ferguson (2009), 702–708. Perhaps in connection to these practices of exorcism, Iunilius Africanus, a sixth-century African author who wrote a manual for interpreting the Bible based on a work of Paul of Nisibis and employing Theodore of Mopsuestia's writings, mentions that catechumens cover their head to show their humility. See *Instituta regularia divinae legis* 11, 16: "Ut est catechumenorum humilitas: typum enim gerunt Adae a paradiso exclusi et ex conscientia delictorum divinum metuentis aspectum, propter quod et per publicum capitibus tectis incedunt" (Kihn, H., (1880), *Theodor von Mopsuestia und Iunilius Africanus als Exegeten* (Freiburg), 510). See Maas, M., (2003), *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean. Iunilius Africanus and the Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis* (Tübingen), 200 for an English translation, and a introduction on Iunilius Africanus' work at 1–115.

attributed to Quodvultdeus and Fulgentius' correspondence connect ritual examinations to the learning of the creed; at the same time, while Fulgentius' correspondence precisely records the existence of a single examination ritual, the same cannot be demonstrated for the sermons.<sup>99</sup> Outside Antioch and Africa, other evidence is provided for Italy: in Milan, Ambrose refers to an examination of bodies and souls (*scrutamen*) comprising an exorcism and preceding the handing over of the creed (*symbolum tradere*).<sup>100</sup> In Rome, the best evidence, in the sixth-century letter of John the deacon to Senarius—analysed in Chapter 6—records another practice, as it mentions three scrutinies focused on an examination of the candidate's faith.<sup>101</sup>

In connection to all this evidence, several scholars have argued that Sermon 216 pertains to the *redditio symboli*, the formal recitation of the creed by candidates and dated it to Easter Vigil or to two or one week before Easter—depending on whether they identified this recitation as the first one or as the final festive one.<sup>102</sup> In particular, Quasten and others have suggested parallels between Sermon 216 to the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, arguing that they would all comment on the same ritual.<sup>103</sup> Most recently, Brons, focusing on Poque's work, has rightly questioned these hypotheses, highlighting that there is simply no evidence in Augustine to connect Sermon 216 to the recitation of the creed.<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, there is nothing to suggest—besides common features such as exorcism and the use of goatskins—that the rites mentioned in the sermons on the creed attributed to Quodvultdeus and in Augustine's Sermon 216 all pertain to a

99 See Chapter 5, 2.2.3 (pp. 252–259) and Chapter 6, 1.2.1 (pp. 295–298).

100 Ambrose, *Explanatio Symboli* 1: "*Celebrata hactenus mysteria scrutaminum. Inquisitum est, ne immunditia in corpore alicuius haereret. Per exorcismum non solum corporis, sed etiam animae quaesita et adhibita est sanctificatio. Nunc tempus est et dies, ut symbolum tradamus*" (Faller, *CSEL* 73 (1955), 3). In Gaul, around 500, the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* canon 85 refer (without precision) to a frequent ritual examination of candidates. In Spain, the fourth-century bishop Pacianus of Barcelona—*De baptismo* 1, 1—also provides early evidence for a pre-baptismal examination, again without concrete details about the rituals.

101 See also for earlier and later Roman evidence, Chapter 6 notes 99–100.

102 See Le Nain de Tillemont (1710), note XIV, 965–967 (shortly before Easter); Roetzer (1930), 150–154 (Easter vigil); Quasten (1956), 101 (two weeks before Easter); one week before Easter: Poque, *sc* 16 (1966), 26–33 followed by Saxer (1988), 387–389; Finn (1990), 592; Ferguson (2009), 78. Further earlier bibliography is recorded in Verbraken (1976), 105–106. Brons (2017), 127 rightly notes that Poque's study has been influential.

103 (Quodvultdeus), *Sy* 1, 11 and *Sy* 3, 1, see as well Augustine, *S.* 215, 1. Eggersdorfer (1907), 154; Dondeyne (1932), 14–18; Quasten (1942), 211–213 (Quasten (1956), 101–102); Poque, *sc* 16 (1966), 26–33; Saxer (1988), 388–389; Klöckener, M., (2003), 'Exorcismus', *AL* 2, fasc 7/8, 1190–1192; Mann (2011), 126–132.

104 Brons (2017), 125–130. Moreover, as argued by Brons (and as I suggest as well later on in this study), the dating of the first recitation of the creed remains uncertain.

single ceremony called the “scrutiny” that would have taken place at the time of the delivering of the creed.<sup>105</sup> We cannot follow Quasten when he argues that ritual practices—with two sessions of exorcism—originated in Antioch, before they were adapted and reduced into a single exorcism session happening near Easter in Africa.<sup>106</sup> Sources bear differences as well as similarities that need to be taken into account.<sup>107</sup> The diversity witnessed in the few available sources suggests that within a common pattern—examination with exorcisms before baptism, often connected to the creed—practices were adapted locally. For Africa, it seems plausible that, as in Antioch and Edessa, there was more than a single session of exorcism during which candidates were examined. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus provide evidence for a session during which the creed was taught, while Augustine’s sermon may rather be related to the admission of candidates to prepare for baptism.<sup>108</sup>

The sermon is in clear contrast to Augustine’s other sermons to *competentes* focusing on the training to learn the creed and the Lord’s Prayer, which include a contextualisation of the ceremonies. While *fides* (faith) is a central theme of the sermon, there is no mention of the creed. This may as well refer more generally to the new relationship that *competentes* are building with God.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the sermon is the only one of the sermons 212–216 to give a definition

105 Even Harmless (2014), 309–313, who suggests that Augustine’s S. 216 was preached early in Lent still argues that the rite attested is the same as Quodvultdeus. Scholarship is often impregnated by not always helpful comparisons of available material. For instance, while the ritual described in Sermon 216 clearly included an exorcism, it seems restrictive to draw clear distinctions between the scrutiny as a ceremony of exorcism in Africa and as an interrogation on faith and knowledge in John the deacon’s letter to Senarius and later Roman liturgical sources (as do Wiegand (1899), 14; Dölger (1909), 44; Dondeyne (1932), 24–25; Capelle (1933), 153; Busch (1939), 435; Kirsten (1960), 103–104; de Latte (1975), 197; Kelly, H.A., (1985), *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology and Drama* (Ithaca NY), 114–118). Much of this scholarship is summarised in Mann (2011), 48–96.

106 Quasten (1942), 212–215 (Quasten (1956), 104–106). A similar reference to penance with the use of goatskins is evoked for infants in seventh-century Spain (see Beitia (2010), 191). However, while Augustine’s influence in the works of Isidore and Ildefonsus of Toledo is clear, it is uncertain if the practices described correspond to what was concretely experienced in Spain at this later period as implied by Quasten.

107 The need to refrain from merging practices is also rightly noted in Brons (2017), 129–130.

108 The following studies all mention this possibility without arguing for it in detail: Busch (1938), 430–431; Monachino (1947), 172; Audet (1954), 158; de Latte (1975), 192; Hill, WSA 111/7 (1993), 167 and 174; Harmless (2014), 310; Eguiarte Bendimez (2016), 83; Brons (2017), 131–134; Vopřada (2020), 118.

109 See a brief analysis in Brons (2017), 131–134 coming to the same conclusion. For a detailed description of the content of this sermon and the imagery used, see Harmless (2014), 313–322.

of the technical term *competens* and to describe the status associated with this category.<sup>110</sup> As insightfully suggested by Busch, there is also an interesting comparison to be made between the interpretation of Psalm 26 found in Sermon 216 and Augustine's explanation of Psalm 26, most likely put into writing in 392: "Christ's new recruit, approaching faith, speaks these words: *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?* (Ps 26, 1)".<sup>111</sup> The reference to candidates as military recruits in both Sermon 216 and the explanation of Psalm 26, with the words *tiro* and *contiro*, recalls the rite of giving one's name to enroll for baptism, bearing an analogy with the recruitment of soldiers, who were required, after a probation stage, to undergo an examination before they could enroll.<sup>112</sup> The connection between the two texts is clear: in Sermon 216, Augustine explains that the *competentes* ask together precisely for the same things as the psalmist, and Psalm 26 was probably chanted at this time of the initiation.<sup>113</sup> Evidence from the titles given to psalms going back to the sixth century strengthen the connection between Psalm 26 and the beginning of the baptismal preparation: the psalm is said to be chanted on a Sunday when candidates first enter

110 Augustine, S. 216, 1: "*Quid enim aliud sunt competentes, quam simul petentes? Nam quomodo condocentes, concurrentes, considentes, nihil aliud sonat, quam simul docentes, simul currentes, simul sedentes; ita etiam competentium vocabulum non aliunde quam de simul petendo atque unum aliquid appetendo compositum est*" (PL 38 (1841), 1077); also noted in Busch (1938), 430; Brons (2017), 131–132. Augustine plays here on the parallel *petendo/appetendo* to refer to the eagerness to receive baptism.

111 Augustine, *In Ps.* 26, 1, 1: "*Tiro Christi loquitur, cum accedit ad fidem: dominus illuminatio mea et salutaris meus: quem timebo?* (Ps 26, 1)" (Weidmann, CSEL 93/1A (2003), 358–359; Boulding, WSA 111/15 (2000), 270). Busch (1938), 430, followed by Poque, SC 16 (1966), 31 and de Latte (1975), 192. On the baptismal feel of *In Ps.* 26, 1 and the connections to Augustine's own experience in the *Confessiones* see Dulaey, BA 58/A (2011), 15–18. The expression "*tiro Christi*" is also found in *Ep.* 243, 1 and 7 (to Laetus, around 394–395, see Hombert (2000), 439–442). In *C. Prisc.* 12, Augustine refers to the training stage (*tirocinium*) of the man born blind (John 9, 31).

112 Augustine, S. 216, 2, in connection to Psalm 26, speaks of "fellow recruits (*contirones*)", a most rare word that Augustine never employs elsewhere. *Tiro* is also found in a sermon preached on the creed attributed to Quodvultdeus: Sy 1, 1.9 (see our discussion of this sermon in Chapter 5, pp. 253–254). Augustine resorts as well to the military imagery of new recruits in *Civ.* VII, 1; S. 90, 9. On the recruitment of soldiers, the probation period, examination (*probatio*) and giving of names, see for instance Davies, R.W., (1969), 'Joining the Roman Army', *BJ* 169, 208–232 reprinted in Davies, R.W., (1989), *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh), 3–30; Watson, G.R., (1969), *The Roman Soldier* (Ithaca NY), 37–44; Whitby, M., (2015), 'Recruitment, Organization: Late Empire', in Le Bohec, Y., et al. (eds.), (2015), *The Encyclopedia of the Roman Army*, 3 volumes (Oxford), III, 809–811 (overview of practices in the later period, with mention of regulations found in the Theodosian Code).

113 Augustine, S. 216, 1–2; Margoni-Kögler (2010), 92.

the preparation (*"ad eos qui primum ingrediuntur, in dominicum"*).<sup>114</sup> Beyond Psalm 26, which seems to have played a particular role at the time of enrolment, psalms were an essential part of the liturgy of initiation: Poque has suggested that Psalm 41, which was certainly chanted at Easter Vigil, may also have been part of the liturgy of enrolment, as suggested by Augustine's commentary on that psalm.<sup>115</sup> Anonymous or pseudo-epigraphic sermons explored in the next chapter further show that other psalms were also learnt and recited by candidates like the creed and the Lord's Prayer before baptism.<sup>116</sup>

Despite uncertainties about the precise organisation or rituals, Sermon 216 seems therefore to be better understood as a sermon preached after the admission of new candidates. This means that this ceremony—which, as we have seen, consisted of a screening of candidates—also included a physical examination and a session of exorcism. This ritual was probably accompanied by the chanting of psalms, in particular Psalm 26 and perhaps Psalm 41. Augustine's preaching concluded this admission ritual, exhorting candidates to carry on their efforts in the following weeks of preparation. The fact that, as we have suggested, candidates could register at different times before Easter also implies that Sermon 216 only provides one example of the incorporation of new candidates, and that other ceremonies could have taken place, for which no sermon is preserved.

In summary, in Hippo in Augustine's time, regular enrolment for baptism happened at Lent over an extended period. Catechumens from Hippo and the surrounding countryside were invited to join the preparation and had to

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- 114 Salmon, P., (1959), *Les "Tituli Psalmorum" des manuscrits latins* (Vatican City), 58: this is a series attested in insular manuscripts from the sixth century onwards and presumably going back to an earlier tradition (see a list of manuscripts at 48–51). The series was notably used in Bede's *De titulis psalmorum* (on which see Fischer, B., (1971), 'Beda de titulis psalmorum liber', in Autenrieth, J., and Brunhölzl, (eds.), *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart), 90–110) and a number of other triple psalters for the Hebrew version (see Pfaff, R.W., (1992), 'The *Tituli*, Collects, Canticles, and Creeds', in Gibson, M., Heslop, T.A., Pfaff, R.W., (eds.), (1992), *The Eadwine Psalter. Text, Image and Monastic Culture in Twelfth Century Canterbury* (London), 88–107, esp. 88–94). Moreover, Psalm 26 was sung at the first Sunday of Lent in old Spanish liturgy (Ps 26, 9.10.7, see Hornby, E., Maloy, R., (2013), *Music and Meaning in Old Hispanic Lenten Chants: Psalmi, Threni and Easter Vigil Canticles* (Woodbridge), 222) and before baptism in tenth-century byzantine liturgy (see Mateos, J., (1963), *Le Typicon de la Grande Église* (Rome), 84–85; Rose, R., (1966), 'Les psaumes de l'initiation chrétienne', *QL* 47, 279–292 at 282–283).
- 115 Augustine, *In. Ps.* 41, 1: "Et quidem non male intellegitur vox esse eorum qui, cum sint catechumeni, ad gratiam sancti lavacri festinant" (Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 38 (1956), 460); see Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 23; Bochet, I., *BA* 59/A (2017), 360.
- 116 See Chapter 5, 3, pp. 278–286.



undergo an admission process consisting in an examination of their conduct, probably with the help of witnesses. Suggesting more flexibility for the admission window to prepare for baptism, together with the attested practice of travelling to the city for the initiation, opens up new perspectives on the preparation for baptism as a progressive process extending during Lent and linking communities beyond Hippo. Travelling to an unknown church presupposes a network available to provide lodging and help in the preparation. The bishop only alludes to such matters in his sermons on the creed and the Lord's prayer, where godparents are said to help candidates in the process of learning and to act in place of infants.<sup>117</sup> It is difficult to point to the concrete way in which these essential networks worked, since no evidence is preserved. Candidates may have travelled with their witnesses, finding accommodation in some dedicated space, as they may have relied on the local church for daily subsistence.<sup>118</sup> Despite evidence being scarce, godparents most likely played a prominent role in accompanying candidates, which were probably initiated in groups divided by gender. Candidates were tested and required to conform their way of life to a series of rules of behaviour. This notably included prohibited activities such as working in shows and prostitution, but also living in what is defined as adulterous relationships. As suggested by the interpretation of Sermon 216, this admission process included a physical examination of candidates and an intense session of exorcism, concluded with an exhortative sermon. There was a clear connection between this ceremony and the first admission into the catechumenate, which, as I have shown in Chapter 2, also included an exhortative speech, exorcism, and required the candidate's commitment. After the admission to prepare for baptism, specific ritual sessions, including exorcisms, for which no detailed description has been preserved, continued to be organised and could serve as an introduction for individuals joining later during Lent. This whole process was intended to single out a new group, the *competentes*, which would become the centre of attention for several weeks until Octave Sunday.

<sup>117</sup> Augustine, S. 213, 11 "*Parentes vestri, qui vos suscipiunt, doceant vos, ut parati inveniamini*" (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 449). On this, Dujarier (1962), 41. For Cavallotto (1996), 175 n. 24 this text means that foreign candidates receive lodging among their relatives, but *suscipere* seems here to mean the act of sponsoring.

<sup>118</sup> Brons (2017), 117 suggests that foreign candidates may have been provided with lodging in Augustine's *xenodochium*.

## 2 The Pre-baptismal Initiation Rituals

### 2.1 Scattered References on Rituals of Penance, Exorcism and Catechesis

Augustine's writings do not provide a comprehensive account in terms of concrete practices of initiation and catechesis designed for *competentes* after the enrolment. The *De fide et operibus* offers the only short overview of key elements, while scattered references complete our fragmentary picture. In the *De fide et operibus*, the rituals preceding baptism are summarised in a sentence: each year a number of candidates are enrolled and "catechised, exorcised and examined (*catechizantur, exorcizantur, scrutantur*)".<sup>119</sup> Augustine also states that the initiation is much more intense for *competentes* than for *catechumeni*, implying a concentration of rituals, although there is no evidence for their frequency.<sup>120</sup> The treatise also refers to specific teaching sessions for *competentes*, called *catechismi*, and meant to teach Christian morals and the keystone texts of the creed and the Lord's Prayer.<sup>121</sup> The word *catechismus*, not attested otherwise in Augustine, seems to have the specific technical meaning of teaching to catechumens.<sup>122</sup>

Other Lenten penitential practices are mentioned in passing in the *De fide et operibus* and elsewhere: candidates were required to take part in fasts, vigils and prayers and abstain from sexual intercourse.<sup>123</sup> Augustine's letter to Ianuarius in particular, written in the early 400s and replying to a number of questions on liturgical matters, provides rare evidence about the practice of abstaining from bathing until Maundy Thursday. Augustine replies to Ianuarius' question about recommended ritual practice for that day and discusses the issue of

119 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9: "*Vel non intueamur alios, qui per annos singulos ad lavacrum regenerationis adcurrunt, quales sint ipsis diebus, quibus catechizantur, exorcizantur, scrutantur*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 44). This fundamental text is thus mentioned and discussed in most studies on the catechumenate in Augustine, see for instance Brons (2017), 118–120.

120 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9: "*Quod autem fit per omne tempus [...] hoc fit multo diligentius et instantius his diebus, quibus competentes vocantur*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 45).

121 Augustine, *F. et op.* 18, 33: "[...] *praeceptis tamen et catechismis validissime flagellantur atque omnes tales mutata in melius voluntate ad baptismum videntur accedere*"; "[...] *ut neque de morum correctione catechizandos esse censeant competentes* [...]"; 19, 35: "[...] *ut in catechismis competentium nec quaerentur nec percuterentur haec vitia* [...]" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 78–80).

122 It is used as the title of *Cat. rud.* in Possidius, *Indiculus* x<sup>3</sup>, 7: "*De cathecismo liber unus*" (Wilmart, *MA* 2 (1931), 179). This is a most rare word with only a few occurrences beyond Augustine and Possidius, see Pignot (2018), 98 esp. n. 89.

123 See Augustine, *Ep.* 54, 4.5–7.10 (fasting-bathing); *F. et op.* 6, 8 (abstinence from sexual intercourse) and more generally *C. Faust.* xxx, 5; *S.* 205–211, *S.* 351–352, 352A (= Dolbeau 14), *Util. ieiun.*

breaking the fast, relating it to the bath. He notes that bathing and fasting are seen as incompatible by many and that breaking the fast on Thursday may have developed because of the bath taken by candidates for baptism. Augustine finds an entirely practical reason for this special bath: cleaning candidates after a long abstinence to avoid unpleasant smells at baptism.<sup>124</sup> Fasting and avoiding bath are thus closely connected throughout the preparation as complementary practices of purification, only suspended on Maundy Thursday. They served as a way to prepare *competentes*, who were asked to live Lent as a period of repentance through abstinence from food, bathing and sex.

In sermons preached at Easter or during Easter week, Augustine looks back at the meaning and aim of the pre-baptismal period. Preaching on Easter day about the Eucharist that the newly baptised are about to receive for the first time, Augustine compares the process of baking bread with the initiation of *competentes*:

How is bread made? It's threshed, ground, goes from the mixing of the dough to the baking; in the mixing it's purified, in the baking it's made firm. Where was your threshing? This is what you have become. It consisted in the fasts, the Lenten observances, the vigils, the exorcisms. You were being ground when you were being exorcised. Dough isn't mixed without water; you were baptised.<sup>125</sup>

In a sermon of doubtful authenticity, the preacher would even bring the analogy back to include the *catechumeni*, who were the wheat stored before *competentes* were milled.<sup>126</sup> Developing this analogy further to the making of wine and the pressing of single grapes, Augustine stressed that the preparation was a trial, progressively bringing all scattered candidates together in the unity of the

124 Augustine, *Ep.* 54, 7.9–10. The *Breviarium Hipponense*, canon 28 similarly rules: “*Ut sacramenta altaris non nisi a ieiunis hominibus celebrentur, excepto uno die anniversario quo Cena Domini celebratur*” (Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974), 41). On *Ep.* 54 see Rexer, J., (2006), ‘Inquisitiones Ianuarii (Ad –)’, *AL* 3, fasc. 3/4, 620–630; Rexer, J., (2010), ‘Die Ostertheologie des Augustinus nach den Briefen *Ad inquisitiones Ianuarii*’, *SP* 49, 293–299.

125 Augustine, *S.* 229A (= Guelf. 7), 2: “*Quomodo fit panis? Trituratur, molitur, a consparsura, in coctura: in consparsura mundatur, coctura firmatur. Ubi tritura vestra? Hoc facti estis: ipsa fuit in ieiuniis, in observationibus, in vigiliis, in exorcismis. Molebamini, quando exorcizabamini. Consparsura non fit sine aqua: baptizati estis*” (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 463; Hill *WSA* 111/6 (1993), 270 adapted). Similar remarks in *S.* 227, 1.

126 Augustine (?), *S.* 229, 1: “*Quando catechumeni differebamini, in horreo servabamini. Nomina vestra dedistis; coepistis moli ieiuniis et exorcismis. Postea ad aquam venistis, et consparsi estis, et unum facti estis*” (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 30).

bread and wine.<sup>127</sup> The whole process, slow and careful as the baking of bread or the making of wine, was to alter the quality of *competentes* to make them a single body. The rites of fasting, vigils and exorcisms are highlighted as means to achieve this transformation.

While fasting and vigils were shared with the baptised, exorcisms seem to have been an essential and specific practice of candidates throughout the preparation. As shown in Chapter 2, pre-baptismal exorcisms may have included an imposition of hands, an invocation of the name of Christ, and particularly the action of *exsufflare*, which refers to hissing and blowing at the candidate to cast out the Devil.<sup>128</sup> The importance of exorcism in the initiation is often stressed in Augustine's polemics against Donatists—accusing them of wrongly repeating the exorcisms on Catholic converts—and against Pelagians—referring to the exorcisms performed on infants during the preparation. Preaching on Psalm 48, perhaps around 406–407, Augustine generically refers to bad Christians noting that they are people who fall into sin, but initially “they approach the faith, cleansed by the word of God and exorcisms performed in the name of Christ in order to receive God's grace and be baptised”.<sup>129</sup> Again, preaching on Ps 65, 12 (“*transivimus per ignem et aquam*”) at an uncertain date after 403, maybe 412, perhaps during Lent and clearly in an anti-Donatist context, Augustine explains:

Once fired, the pot has no fear of water; but an unfired pot, when put into water, dissolves back into mud. Don't rush into the water: pass through fire to the water in order to pass through the water too. This is why in our sacramental rites, in the catechesis and in the exorcisms, fire is applied first—for if this is not fire, why is it that the evil spirits often scream, “It's burning me”?—and after this fire of exorcism one comes to baptism, as from fire to water, and from water to a place of cool relief.<sup>130</sup>

127 Augustine, S. 229A (= Guelf. 7), 2.

128 See Chapter 2, 1.2, pp. 110–114.

129 Augustine, *In. Ps.* 48 11, 1: “*primo accedunt ad fidem mundati verbo dei et exorcismis in nomine Christi, ut accipiant gratiam dei, ut baptizentur*” (Dekkers-Fraipont, *CCSL* 38 (1956), 565; Boulding, *WSA* 111/16 (2000), 367). For the dating see Dulaey, *BA* 59B (2019), 188–190.

130 Augustine, *In. Ps.* 65, 17: “*Vas ergo iam igne firmatum aquam non timet; vas autem si solidatum igne non fuerit, tamquam lutum aqua solvetur. Noli festinare ad aquam: per ignem transi ad aquam, ut transeas et aquam. Propterea et in sacramentis, in catechizando, et in exorcizando, adhibetur prius ignis—nam unde plerumque immundi spiritus clamant: ‘ardeo,’ si ille ignis non est?—post ignem autem exorcismi venit ad baptismum, ut ab igne ad aquam, ab aqua in refrigerium*” (Müller, H., (1997), *Eine Psalmenpredigt über die Auferstehung: Augustinus, Enarratio in Psalmum 65: Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kom-*

As fire slowly bakes bread and cooks pots, making them firm and ready, these pre-baptismal exorcisms—repeated, it seems, over an extended period—strengthen the *competentes*' new identity and belonging to Augustine's community. The sermons also show that exorcisms were closely connected to the catechesis. Together, they provided the means to eradicate the older self both from body and mind, and make room for a new individual. As we shall see in Chapter 6, this close connection of catechesis and exorcism explains why early medieval liturgical sources employ *catechizare* to refer to exorcisms of infants in baptismal ceremonies. The catechesis outlines the transformation enacted in exorcisms.

This short overview of Augustine's scattered references to ritual practices give us a broad idea of how *competentes* were initiated, without, unfortunately, providing enough evidence to get a clear idea of how rituals were organised, performed and experienced throughout the preparation. Teaching and ritual sessions for *competentes* must have regularly taken place during Lent, as is clear from the *De fide et operibus*,<sup>131</sup> while Poque has noticed that Augustine's Sermon 5 on the flight of Jacob (Gn. 32, 22–32)—preached to a wider audience at an uncertain date—alludes to a reading of Scripture given to *competentes* earlier on the day.<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately, only little evidence of these special sessions of catechesis has been preserved.<sup>133</sup> The only part of the baptismal preparation after enrolment that is better known to us is the learning and memorising of the creed and the Lord's Prayer by the candidates, taking place towards the end of the catechumenate. Any account of the catechumenate in Augustine's community can only be based on a general overview of the main rituals from scattered references. Greater detail can only be reached for these ceremonies surrounding the teaching and learning of the creed and the Lord's Prayer. The rest of this chapter is therefore devoted to this process and aims to shed light on the final part of the candidates' preparation, leading to the end of the catechumenate and the baptismal rituals.

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mentar (Vienna), 86; Boulding, *WSA* III/17 (2001), 300 adapted); see dating hypotheses in Müller (2001), 817. In *In Ps. 57, 5* Augustine similarly preaches in a Donatist context against hurrying to baptism (see Chapter 2, note 106).

131 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9; 9, 14; 18, 33; 19, 35.

132 Augustine S. 5, 3: "*Pendebat in cruce, quomodo competentibus legimus*" (Lambot, *CCSL* 41 (1961), 52); Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 25; Harmless (2014), 308.

133 For Dolbeau (2019), 9 n. 24 this would be because of the absence of notaries at these sessions restricted to candidates for baptism.

## 2.2 *The End of the Catechumenate: Learning, Memorising and Reciting the Creed and the Lord's Prayer*

The evidence preserved amounts to five sermons and a fragment on the creed and four sermons on the Lord's prayer—to which one may add a recently discovered sermon of uncertain attribution.<sup>134</sup> Following on a long tradition of scholars, the content of this catechesis has been carefully studied by Harmless and in particular by Brons, who most recently provided a translation and analysis of each sermon.<sup>135</sup> Hence it is not necessary to dwell on these aspects here, but only to highlight the significance of the creed and the Lord's prayer for Augustine's pre-baptismal catechesis and to summarise its main features. More attention will be devoted to the concrete organisation of the ceremonies, the many gaps in our knowledge, and the broader meaning and purpose of this initiation process.

For his explanations, Augustine followed on a rich exegetical tradition. The teaching of the creed during the Lenten preparation for baptism is a widely attested practice in the fourth-fifth centuries and beyond. The creed provides an essential guide to the catechesis, although emphasis on the creed—and the text used—could vary locally: it appears to be central to the teaching in Jerusalem (Cyril, Egeria) and Antioch (John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia), but less relevant in Ambrose's catechesis focused on Scripture and particularly Old Testament figures.<sup>136</sup> It is difficult, knowing the fragmentary state of Augustine's pre-baptismal catechesis, to situate the teaching on the creed within the broader Lenten teaching for *competentes*. It may only be said that this teaching provided a way of summarising what had already been taught on the basis of Scripture during the catechumenate—either in special sessions or through ordinary preaching.<sup>137</sup> For the Lord's Prayer, Augustine is the earliest known witness in the West for the practice of teaching it before baptism rather than after—while Theodore of Mopsuestia is a witness for the

<sup>134</sup> Augustine, S. 212–213–213–214–214A (= Dolbeau 1, fragment), *Symb. cat.*; S. 56–57–58–59; 59A (Weidmann, *CSEL* 101 (2015), 39–44, although there are reservations about authenticity, see Dolbeau, *REAug* 62 (2016), 449).

<sup>135</sup> Harmless (2014), 322–344; Brons (2017), 143–181 (for S. 212–215) and 183–196 (for S. 56–59). Other overviews are Roetzer (1930), 146–150; Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 9–115; Grossi (1993), 60–98; Eguiarte Bendímez (2016), 80–96; Vopřada (2020), 118–126.

<sup>136</sup> See Ambrose, *De Mysteriorum* 1, 1. There is no evidence for teaching the creed before baptism in sources before the fourth century, although it may have been part of the initiation. For more details about pre-baptismal catechetical practices in the fourth/fifth-century East and West, see the studies quoted in Introduction notes 31, 38–41.

<sup>137</sup> See some useful discussion in Grossi (1993), 61–63.

East.<sup>138</sup> However, the assumption that Augustine introduced the practice in Africa seems unlikely, particularly because a number of anonymous sermons—not necessarily dependent on Augustine—witness to the same practice.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, in Italy, while Ambrose's candidates learnt the prayer only after baptism, the practice of teaching it before baptism is attested by Peter Chrysologus' sermons for fifth-century Ravenna. Progressively, during the Early Middle Ages, this practice would become more widespread in the West.<sup>140</sup> Evidence about the teaching and learning of the creed and the Lord's Prayer shows that at Augustine's time common practices were starting to emerge but were still far from being uniform and depended on local initiative.

### 2.2.1 The Ritual Organisation of the *traditio/redditio*

In Augustine's community, the creed and the Lord's Prayer (*symbolum* or *regula fidei* and *oratio dominica*) were learnt in the last weeks preceding baptism, during ceremonies formally handing them over to candidates generally referred with the technical terms *traditio/trahere*. The ceremonies consisted in revealing the meaning of the creed and the Lord's prayer (*sacramenta*) and transmitting their text orally to candidates, who were required to memorise and then recite them in separate ceremonies (*reddere/redditio*), to demonstrate

138 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 11. See, on the Lord's prayer before baptism (among the abundant available bibliography): Bouhot, J.-P., (1980), 'Une ancienne homélie catéchétique pour la tradition de l'oraison dominicale', *Augustinianum* 20, 69–78; Grossi, V., (1980), 'Il contesto battesimale dell'oratio dominica nei commenti di Tertulliano, Cipriano, Agostino', *Augustinianum* 20/1–2, 205–220; Schnurr, K.B., (1985), *Hören und handeln. Lateinische Auslegungen des Vaterunsers in der alten Kirche bis zum 5. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna), 110–121; Kai-Yung Chan, A., (1993), 'Il rito della consegna del Padre Nostro (Mt 6,9–13) nei Sermoni LVI–LIX di sant'Agostino di Ippona', *Ecclesia Orans* 10, 287–312; Grossi (1993), 74–77; Bouhot, J.-P., (2003), 'La tradition catéchétique et exégétique du Pater noster', *RecAug* 33, 3–18; Hammerling, R., (ed.), (2008), *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden-Boston), 167–182, revised and reprinted in Hammerling, R., (2010), *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church* 59–77 (see esp. 69–72); Metzger, M., (2010), 'Le Notre Père dans les institutions baptismales', *ASR* 3, 41–54.

139 With Hammerling (2010), 69 against Bouhot (2003), 9. For Grossi (1993), 74 it is an African tradition. For the anonymous sermons see Chapter 5, note 189.

140 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* v, 4.18–30; Peter Chrysologus, *Sermons* 67–72. Bouhot (2003), 10 (going against his earlier study of 1980), wrongly states that there is no evidence to situate Peter's sermons in the liturgy. While a precise dating is not possible, these sermons are still closely connected to *Sermons* 56–62bis on the creed, which were delivered during Lent (*Sermon* 60, 2): see the connections made in *Sermons* 56, 3; 67, 1; 68, 3; 71, 1–2. For later evidence see Bouhot (1980), 70–73 (arguing that in Rome the practice was introduced in the sixth century); Bouhot (2003), 10–12; Hammerling (2010), 72–77. The teaching of the prayer before baptism is notably included in the Old Gelasian sacramentary i, xxvi.

that they were ready to profess what to believe (*credere*) and knew how to pray to God (*petere*).<sup>141</sup> Despite the information that can be gathered from the preserved sermons on the creed and the Lord's Prayer, again, many gaps are left in our knowledge and only a few details on the main structure of the initiation are provided.

The sermons are addressed to *competentes* of various backgrounds, as I have already suggested. Baptised Christians are also part of the audience, not least because the candidates were supported by godparents.<sup>142</sup> Both adults and children of all ages were initiated—as shown in Chapter 2—most probably in the same sessions of *traditio/redditio*.<sup>143</sup> The creed was taught first, and on the day of the first recitation of the creed, the teaching on the Lord's prayer followed, while further recitations of the Lord's Prayer and of the creed took place later.<sup>144</sup> The links between the *traditio* and *redditio symboli* and the *traditio orationis* are stated in Sermon 213 and repeated in Sermons 56 to 59: in particular Sermons 56 and 57 explain that candidates receive the creed first and only later the Lord's prayer, justifying the practice on the ground of Rm 10, 13 referring back to Joel 2, 32 (*“Et erit, omnis homo qui invocaverit nomen Domini, salvus erit”*). Augustine

141 Augustine, S. 228, 3: *“tractavimus ad eos de sacramento symboli, quod credere debeant: tractavimus de sacramento orationis dominicae, quomodo petant”* (PL 38 (1841), 1102). Besides the sermons of *traditio/redditio* themselves (S. 56, 57, 58, 59, 212, 213, 214, *Symb. cat.*), see also for instance: *F. et symb.* 1. 1: *“pro symbolo gratiam Dei consequentibus memoriae mandanda et reddenda tradatur”*; *F. et op.* 11.17: *“symbolum tradimus, reddendumque reposcimus”*; *F. et op.* 20, 36: *“eo ritu quo symbolum traditur”* (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 4, 55 and 81); *Gest. Pel.* 2, 4: *“baptizandi catechizantur, ut symbolum noverint. [...] tradatur credentibus”* (Urba-Zycha, CSEL 42 (1902), 55); *Io. eu. tr.* 98, 5: *“per symbolum traditur et orationem dominicam”* (Willems, CCSL 36 (1954), 579); *Retr.* 1, 17: *“verborum illa contextio, quae tenenda memoriter competentibus traditur”* (Mutzenbecher, CCSL 57 (1984), 52); S. 227, 1: *“quid reddidistis in symbolo?”*, *“orationem dominicam quam accepistis et reddidistis”* (Poque, SC 116 (1966), 238 and 240).

142 Augustine, S. 57, 7.7: *“Norunt etiam spiritalem alimoniam fideles, quam et vos scituri estis, accepturi de altare Dei”*; S. 58, 6. 7: *“Et vos, fideles, qui per hanc occasionem audistis hanc orationem et nostram expositionem”* (Verbraken et al., CCSL 41Aa (2008), 183 and 205).

143 See Chapter 2, 1.3 (pp. 114–116). Augustine says little about godparents: they could help in the memorisation process (S. 58, 11.13), and in the case of babies, they replied to a series of interrogations on the creed to convalidate the babies' faith, and renounced the Devil on their behalf (Augustine, *Bapt.* IV, 24.31; *Ep.* 98, 5–10; *Pecc. mer.* 1, 19.25 and 33.62; S. 351, 2.2). Babies obtain the “sacrament of faith (*sacramentum fidei*)”, although they have no knowledge of the creed (*Ep.* 98, 5–10; *Gest. Pel.* 2, 4). In *Ep.* 5\*, 2, written during Augustine's last years, the bishop states that, as for the creed, the Lord's Prayer was recited on behalf of the newly baptised babies by the godparents: *“[...] aut pro eis maiores aliquid de dominica oratione respondent sicut de symboli fide, (sine) qua baptizari omnino non possunt et ideo qui eos gestant pro eis ad ipsa verba interrogati respondent”* (Divjak, BA 46B (1987), 120).

144 For discussion of the precise calendar, see the next section.



notes that because Paul added in Rm 10, 14–15 that one needs to believe before invoking the Lord, candidates should start by learning the creed before the prayer.<sup>145</sup> Although this repetition probably only reflects the concerns and specific genre of Augustine's catechesis, it remains possible that Rm 10, 13–15 was also read before the sermons on the Lord's Prayer, since all quote part of it at the beginning.<sup>146</sup>

The four preserved sermons on the *traditio symboli* contain clues about the concrete organisation of the catechesis and show some diversity.<sup>147</sup> In Sermon 213, after an introduction, a note inserted in the sermon explains that the creed is recited to the candidates, before the preacher discusses the propositions one by one.<sup>148</sup> Another note in Sermon 214 shows that it follows the same procedure, while the preacher only explains the creed more broadly, not following the propositions in detail.<sup>149</sup> By contrast, Sermon 212 discusses the creed in general without focusing on each proposition, before it is recited to candidates.<sup>150</sup> Finally, in the sermon *De symbolo ad catechumenos*, after the creed is recited to candidates, Augustine comments on each proposition—except Christ's Resurrection—without an introduction and without details about the

145 Augustine, S. 213, 1: "*Nemo potest invocare, nisi primo crediderit. Quia ergo iste ordo est, ut prius credatis, postea invocetis, hodie accipitis symbolum fidei, in quo credatis; post octo autem dies orationem, in qua invocetis*" (Morin, MA 1 (1930), 442); 56, 1.1: "*Ideo non accepistis prius orationem, et postea symbolum, sed prius symbolum, ubi sciretis quid crederetis, et postea orationem, ubi nossetis quem invocaretis*", see also 56, 5.7: "*memento quod in symbolo reddidisti*" (Verbraken et al., CCL 41Aa (2008), 153–154 and 157); similar thoughts in S. 57, 1.1; 58, 1.1; 59, 1.1. In the *Enchiridion* to Laurentius, the same justification is found, Augustine also noting that the three virtues he is expounding to Laurentius, faith, hope and charity, are summarised in the creed and the Lord's prayer (*Ench.* 2, 7).

146 As suggested by Kai-Yung Chan (1993), 306–307; this however is rejected by Margoni-Kögler (2010), 394 n. 253. See Augustine, S. 56, 1.1 (Rm 10, 13–15); S. 57, 1.1 (Rm 10, 13–15); S. 58, 1.1 (Rm 10, 14); 59, 1 (Rm 10, 14). S. 59A, of dubious authenticity, does not quote the passage, but its beginning is fragmentary.

147 As already noticed by Poque, S., (1985), 'Au sujet d'une singularité romaine de la "redditio symboli" ("Confessions" 8, 2, 5)', *Augustinianum* 25, 133–143, at 137.

148 Augustine, S. 213, 2: "*Hoc est quod primum vobis breviter pronuntiabo. Deinde, quantum dominus donare dignatus fuerit, aperiam vobis; ut quod tenere vos volo, et intellegere valeatis. Hoc est symbolum. Et post symbolum: non est multum, et multum est*" (Morin, MA 1 (1930), 443).

149 Augustine, S. 214, 1: "*Post hanc praelocutionem pronuntiandum est totum symbolum, sine aliqua interposita disputatione: Credo in deum patrem omnipotentem, et cetera quae sequuntur in eo. Quod symbolum nostis quia scribi non solet. Quo dicto, adiungenda est haec disputatio*" (Verbraken (1962), 14).

150 Augustine, S. 212, 2: "*Quod symbolum cum audieritis totum, istum sermonem nostrum breviter collectum recognoscetis. [...] Quicquid enim in symbolo audituri estis, iam divinis sanctorum scripturarum litteris continetur*" (Poque, SC 16 (1966), 182).

liturgical setting.<sup>151</sup> As none of these sermons can be securely dated, there is no evidence to suggest how and when Augustine may have changed procedure in the course of his life.<sup>152</sup> On the ground of variety, La Bonnardière has doubted the authenticity of Sermons 212 and 215—more specifically because they both explain the article of the creed pertaining to the Church at the very end of the sermon, in the same fashion as sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, but in contrast to Augustine's other sermons.<sup>153</sup> The issue of authorship is most complex in the case of catechesis to candidates, which was both a specific and adaptable genre. As is clear from Sermon 214, sermons could be reused by others. The procedure described in Sermons 213 and 214 perhaps reflects the most common practice adopted and promoted by Augustine—the other two sermons, which provide less details about the ritual practice, might be fragmentary.<sup>154</sup> It is also possible that the sermons here discussed were preached in different settings and places at different times—and some might not fully reflect Augustine's preaching.

In contrast to the *traditio symboli*, only Sermon 215 has been preserved for the ceremony of recitation of the creed (*redditio symboli*). The manuscript transmission has the generic title “On the Creed”, while its content is very similar to the *traditio symboli* sermons, again starting with a short introduction, before discussing each proposition of the creed.<sup>155</sup> The only clear difference is that it refers to the recitation of the creed by each candidate at a time (“*singuli reddidistis*”), pointing to the specific ceremony of *redditio symboli*.<sup>156</sup> The sermon was therefore preached after candidates had recited the creed that they

<sup>151</sup> The current title of this sermon (going back to the first editor Amerbach) does not reflect the preserved manuscripts—which have simply *De symbolo*, see Dolbeau, F., ‘Symbolo ad catechumenos, (De –)’, *AL* (forthcoming). Indeed, this title is quite inappropriate, knowing of Augustine's technical use of *catechumenus* to point to candidates who have not yet enrolled to prepare for baptism. The sermon is dated with uncertainty after 415, see Chapter 2, note 103 for bibliography.

<sup>152</sup> For dating hypotheses of Sermons 212–214, see Verbraken (1976), 104–105.

<sup>153</sup> (Quodvultdeus), Sy 1–2–3, discussed in Chapter 5. See La Bonnardière, A.-M., (1967b), ‘Pénitence et réconciliation des pénitents d’après saint Augustin’, *REAug* 13, 31–53 at 39 n. 25.

<sup>154</sup> The quality of the textual transmission of these sermons can be doubted. See the remarks for *Symb. cat.* in Dolbeau, F., ‘Symbolo ad catechumenos, (De –)’, *AL* (forthcoming); for Sermon 213, the text known until the early twentieth century was much improved thanks to Morin's discovery of a unique collection of Augustine's sermons in Wolfenbüttel (see Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 441).

<sup>155</sup> See Verbraken, P.-P., (1958), ‘Les sermons CCXV et LVI de saint Augustin *De symbolo* et *De oratione dominica*’, *RBen* 68, 5–40 at 18.

<sup>156</sup> Augustine, S. 215, 1: “*Sacrosancti mysterii symbolum, quod simul accepistis, et singuli hodie reddidistis*” (Verbraken (1958), 18).

had received and learnt, and before the handing over of the Lord's Prayer on the same day.<sup>157</sup> This practice is reflected in the earliest manuscript witness of Sermon 215 (Paris, *BNF*, lat. 13367, sixth century) and related copies, which transmit it followed by Sermon 56 on the Lord's Prayer. While this corresponds to liturgical custom, it is also possible—but not demonstrable—that the two sermons circulated together from the time of their composition.<sup>158</sup>

Further clues in Sermon 212, 215 and *De symbolo ad catechumenos* also show that the ceremonies of teaching and reciting the creed were connected to other ritual practices. Thus, Sermons 212 and 215 refer to a renunciation of the Devil—without situating it precisely—while the *De symbolo ad catechumenos* points to exorcisms performed on infants earlier on the same day.<sup>159</sup> This shows that catechesis on the creed was connected to rituals of exorcism and renunciation, although the precise organisation of rituals remains uncertain. Such scattered remarks recall what is found in the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, which mention and describe a rite of renunciation and exorcisms performed before the learning and reciting of the creed. This evidence, together with Augustine's Sermon 216, suggests that there were probably multiple sessions of exorcism before baptism in Hippo, about which, however, little is known.

The sermons on the Lord's Prayer (56–57–58–59) were all preached for the handing over of the prayer (*traditio orationis*) and they are more consistent, either as a result of Augustine's own consistency in general, or because they represent a more uniform set of catecheses.<sup>160</sup> They all follow the same pro-

157 See further on our discussion of the calendar of the ceremonies. There is no firm ground to date this sermon, see hypotheses in Verbraken (1976), 105.

158 Verbraken (1958), 6–7 and Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 149.

159 Augustine, *S.* 215, 1: "*Renuntiantes enim diabolo, pompis et angelis eius mentem et animam subtrahentes, oblivisci oportet praeteritorum, et vetustate prioris vitae contempta*" (Verbraken, *RBen* 68 (1958), 18); *S.* 212, 1 "*Vos per Christi gratiam reviviscitis a morte quadam cui renuntiatis*" (Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 176). This renunciation preceded the recitation of the creed. On the exorcism: *Symb. cat.* 1.2: "*Ideo sicut uidistis hodie, sicut nostis, et paruuli exsufflantur et exorcizantur*" (Vander Plaetse *CCSL* 46 (1969), 186). Tertullian is the earliest Latin witness to the renunciation formula preceding baptism, see Introduction, note 7. On pre-baptismal renunciation and the various formulae, with more bibliography, see Waszink, J.H., (1947), 'Pompa diaboli', *Vigiliae Christianae* 1, 15–43; Kirsten, H., (1960), *Die Taufabsage: Eine Untersuchung zu Gestalt und Geschichte der Taufe nach den altkirchlichen Taufliturgien* (Berlin, 1960), 39–51; Thraede (1969), 98–100; Kelly (1985), 94–105; Van Slyke, D., (2005), 'The Devil and His Poms in Fifth-Century Carthage: Renouncing Spectacula with Spectacular Imagery', *DOP* 59, 53–72.

160 Possidius, *Indiculus* x<sup>6</sup>, 176 records only one sermon on the Lord's Prayer (perhaps *S.* 56 for Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 149). The dating of the *S.* 56–59 is uncertain; the datings recorded in Verbraken (1976), 66–67; Grossi (1993), 74; Kinzig (2017a), 11, 301, are all

cedure: the preacher gives a short introduction on the prayer and praying in general, relating it to the creed already learnt and recited, before quoting and commenting on each verse, finally discussing the broad structure of the prayer and exhorting his audience to put it into practice.<sup>161</sup> Sermons 57 and 59 make clear that the prayer is heard before the preacher comments on it,<sup>162</sup> while Sermons 58 and 59 show that Mt 6, 9–13 was read before the explanation.<sup>163</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Calendar of the Ceremonies

The scarce evidence found in sermons about the calendar followed for these ceremonies has received particular attention in scholarship. Although considerable effort has been devoted to precisely situate the *traditio symboli* and *traditio orationis* in the Lenten preparation, no consensus has emerged. On the contrary, various interpretations have been put forward and passed on in scholarship, all based on the ambiguous evidence found in the sermons.<sup>164</sup> It

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based on references to the Pelagian controversy and are inconclusive, see Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 150–151, 176, 197, 219; De Coninck, L., Coppiters 't Wallant, B., Demeulenaere, R., (2009), 'À propos de la datation des *sermones ad populum*: s. 51–70A', in Partoens, G., Dupont, A., Lamberigts, M., (eds.), (2009), *Ministerium sermonis. Philological, Historical, and Theological Studies on Augustine's Sermones ad populum* (Turnhout), 49–67, at 57–60. The same can be said of the hypothesis of Schnurr (1985), 120–121 who suggested that S. 56–59 all date before the Pelagian controversy.

- 161 Augustine (?), S. 59A recently discovered, follows the same structure but is fragmentary at the beginning, thus missing any information on the ritual procedure, and it has no conclusion. Its attribution to Augustine is doubtful, not the least because it uses the peculiar text *ne nos passus fueris induci* (Mt 6, 13), a most rare reading attested in two anonymous sermons perhaps from late antique Africa: PS-FU s 70 (*Inc.*: "Non debet in certamine formidare") and QU tr 1 (*Inc.*: "Videmus dilectissimi vestram"). Usually, Augustine employs the peculiar reading *ne nos inferas* (notably in all his sermons to *competentes*), see Bavel, T. van, (1959), 'Inferas—Inducas. À propos de Mtth. 6, 13 dans les œuvres de saint Augustin', *RBen* 59, 348–351.
- 162 Augustine, S. 57, 1.1: "*Hodie didicistis eum invocare, in quem credidistis*"; S. 59, 1.1: "*Reddidistis quod credatis, audistis quid oretis*" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 178 and 221).
- 163 Augustine, S. 58, 1.1: "*Accipite hodie quomodo invocetur Deus. Ipse filius eius, sicut audistis cum evangelium legeretur, docuit discipulos suos et fideles suos hanc orationem*"; 59, 1.1: "*sicut audistis cum evangelium legeretur, ab ipso Domino tradita est discipulis ipsius*" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 199 and 221).
- 164 See Martène (1700), I.1, 84; Höfling (1859), 229; Probst (1884), 98; Kattenbusch (1894), 53; Wiegand (1899), 26 n. 1; Kattenbusch (1900), 445 n. 25; de Puniet (1925), 2597; Dondeyne (1932), 13–14; Busch (1938), 445–446; Monachino (1947), 177–178; Verbraken (1958), 5–6; Eichenseer (1960), 137–145; van der Meer (1961), 359–360; Poque, sc 116 (1966), 26–27 and 59; de Latte (1975), 203; Verbraken (1976), 66–67; Bouhot (1980), 70–71 n. 8; Verbraken, P.-P., (1984), 'Le sermon LVIII de saint Augustin pour la tradition du "Pater"', *Ecclesia Orans* 1, 113–132 at 113; Schnurr (1985), 111; Verbraken, P.-P., 'Le Sermon 57 de saint Augustin pour la

has often been overlooked, even in the detailed discussion of Kai-Yun-Chan—reviewing earlier hypotheses and situating the recitation of the Lord's Prayer on Holy Saturday in the morning—that the sermons only provide evidence to draw a *relative* chronology.<sup>165</sup> However, only few scholars have abstained from providing a specific dating.<sup>166</sup> Most recently, Brons, following in the steps of Max, has emphasised this point and provided an overview of issues and previous scholarship.<sup>167</sup>

The evidence is as follows: Sermon 213, preached for the *traditio symboli*, explains that a first recitation of the creed (*redditio symboli*) will take place in eight days, on the same day as the handing over of the Lord's Prayer (*traditio orationis*).<sup>168</sup> Indeed, all sermons for the *traditio orationis* mention that the creed is taught first, and that it has been recited by candidates.<sup>169</sup> Sermon 58, preached for this ceremony of *traditio orationis*, situates the recitation of the Lord's prayer (*redditio orationis*) eight days later, but adds that candidates who have made mistakes on the day of the first formal recitation of the creed will have the opportunity to recite it correctly at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, although the Lord's prayer is *not* recited that day.<sup>170</sup> Sermon 59 for the *traditio orationis* also indicates that the recitation of the Lord's Prayer will take

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tradition de l'Oraison dominicale', in Mayer, C., (ed.), (1987), *Homo Spiritualis. Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Würzburg), 411–424, at 411; Saxer (1988), 383; Lamirande (1992a), 793; Rodomonti (1995), 132; Rebillard (1999), 775 and 781; Gavriluk (2007), 199; Gryson (2007), 1, 234–235 and 242; Hammerling (2010), 69–70; Jensen-Patout Burns (2015), 206; Eguarte Bendímez (2016), 87–89; Vopřada (2020), 121–126; Dolbeau, F., 'Symbolo ad catechumenos, (De –)', *AL* 5 forthcoming.

165 Kai-Yung Chan, A., (1993), 'Il rito della consegna del *Padre Nostro* (Mt 6,9–13) nei *Sermoni LVI–LIX* di Sant'Agostino di Ippona', *Ecclesia Orans* 10, 287–312, esp. 289–301.

166 Roetzer (1930), 148–140 (underlining uncertainty but still suggesting a week of interval between each rite); Grossi (1993), 90; Verbraken et al., *CCL* 41Aa (2008), 150–151.

167 Max (2008), 29–34; Brons (2017), 135–139.

168 Augustine, S. 213, 1: "Hodie accipitis symbolum fidei, in quo credatis; post octo autem dies orationem, in qua invocetis" and 213, 11: "Ad octo dies reddituri estis, quod hodie accepistis" (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 449).

169 For the *traditio symboli* preceding the *traditio orationis* see note 145; for the *redditio symboli*: Augustine, S. 56, 5.7: "Memento quod in symbolo reddidisti"; similarly see S. 57, 2.2; S. 58, 1.1; S. 59, 1.1 (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 157).

170 Augustine, S. 58, 1.1: "Tenete ergo et hanc orationem, quam reddituri estis ad octo dies. Quicumque autem vestrum non bene symbolum reddiderunt, habent spatium: quia die sabbati, audientibus omnibus qui aderunt, reddituri estis, die sabbati novissimo, quo die baptizandi estis. Ad octo autem dies ab hodierno die reddituri estis hanc orationem, quam hodie accipitis"; 11.13: "Ideo die sabbati, quando vigilaturi sumus in Dei misericordia, reddituri estis, non orationem, sed symbolum" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 199 and 212).

place eight days later, adding that it will not constitute a true prayer, but only a rehearsal, since the first time that candidates will pray the Lord's prayer is after baptism.<sup>171</sup>

All this evidence shows that the formal handing over of the creed happened on an unknown day during Lent, followed one week later by the first formal recitation of the creed and, on the same day, of the handing over of the Lord's Prayer. One week later, before baptism, but not on Easter Vigil, there was a rehearsal for the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. During Easter Vigil, the final solemn recitation of the creed took place, while the formal recitation of the prayer happened only after baptism, on Easter day, when the newly baptised took part for the first time to the full mass with the other members of the faithful. Elsewhere, the *Confessiones* provide further evidence for the solemn *redditio symboli* taking place on Easter Vigil: Augustine recalls the impressive profession of faith of Marius Victorinus in front of the whole crowd of the faithful, from a high spot, while he adds that shy candidates were allowed to recite it "privately" (*secretius*).<sup>172</sup> While this is described as a Roman practice, it seems that in Africa too candidates recited the creed in front of baptised Christians.<sup>173</sup> This would make sense knowing that baptised Christians were also present during the rest of the initiation. The only other allusion in Augustine about this ceremony refers to the recitation "with everyone present listening".<sup>174</sup> This recitation was the final one, witnessed by the whole assembly.<sup>175</sup> The following tables summarise the evidence:

171 Augustine, S. 59, 4.7: "*Ergo, quia cotidie dicturi estis etiam post baptismum, et magis post baptismum—non enim orabitis hanc orationem nisi post baptismum, ad octo enim dies reddituri illam estis, non oraturi; post baptismum illam orabitis, quomodo enim dicit Pater noster qui nondum est natus?*" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 225).

172 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.5: "*Denique ut ventum est ad horam profitendae fidei, quae verbis certis conceptis retentisque memoriter de loco eminentiore in conspectu populi fidelis Romae reddi solet ab eis, qui accessuri sunt ad gratiam tuam*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 116).

173 For more discussion on this see Poque (1985) who provides a number of ways of interpreting Augustine's narrative. Her suggestion that Augustine would have introduced this Roman practice in Africa, however, is debatable.

174 Augustine, S. 58, 1.1: "*die sabbati, audientibus omnibus qui aderunt, reddituri estis*" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 199).

175 Just before baptism, as part of the baptismal ritual, candidates were tested again in the form of questions and answers: they were required to renounce the Devil and state their faith in the Trinity, see Augustine, *C. litt. Pet.* 111, 8.9: "*Non itaque nos, sed Christum induistis, nec vos interrogavi utrum ad me converteremini, sed ad Deum vivum, nec utrum in me crederetis, sed in patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum*" (Petschenig, *CSEL* 52 (1909), 171); see as well, in an anti-Pelagian context, *Ep.* 98, 7; *Ep.* 217, 5.16; *Pecc. mer.* 1, 34.63. In *F. et op.* 9, 14, Augustine states that the creed should be taught in full, except in emergency, when the preparation is shortened and baptism is preceded only by questions and answers.

Day 1	Day 8	Day 15
<i>Traditio symboli</i>	<i>Redditio symboli</i> ; <i>Traditio orationis</i>	<i>Redditio orationis</i> (informal, not on Saturday Vigil)
<hr/>		
Saturday Vigil	Easter	
<hr/>		
Solemn <i>redditio symboli</i>	Praying the Lord's Prayer during mass	

Most scholars have put forward hypotheses for a more precise calendar. Poque, followed by Verbraken and Saxer, suggested that the *traditio symboli* took place on Saturday two weeks before Easter, the *redditio symboli* one week later on the day before the sixth Sunday of Lent (or Palm Sunday) and therefore the informal *redditio orationis* and another *redditio symboli* on Holy Saturday in the morning, with the solemn *redditio symboli* taking place in the evening, during Easter Vigil.<sup>176</sup> However, Augustine distinguishes between Holy Saturday and the day of the informal *redditio orationis*.<sup>177</sup> For this reason, it seems more likely, as Dondeyne and Bouhot have suggested, that there were only two ceremonies of *redditio symboli* and that the main rites of *traditio/redditio* took place on Sundays. For Dondeyne, the *traditio symboli* took place on the fourth Sunday of Lent, three weeks before Easter, the *redditio symboli* and *traditio orationis* on the fifth Sunday, and thus the informal *redditio orationis* on Palm Sunday, one week before Easter.<sup>178</sup> While this hypothesis appears to be the most probable, the whole process could have started earlier on another Sunday or indeed on any day of the week.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, Dondeyne based his dating on the wrong

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Poque, *sc* 116 (1966), 26 and 59; Verbraken (1984), 133 and Saxer (1988) 386.

177

See note 170.

178

Dondeyne (1932), 13–14 followed by Bouhot (1980), 70 n. 7 and Bouhot, J.P., (1986), *REAug* 32, 288 reviewing Verbraken (1984). The concentration of rituals on Sundays would also broadly correspond to what is known for other regions in the West: Ambrose, *Ep.* 76, 4 situates the *traditio symboli* on Palm Sunday, as does later canon 13 of the council of Agde (506AD): “*Symbolum etiam placuit ab omnibus ecclesiis una die, idest ante octo dies dominicae resurrectionis, publice in ecclesia a sacerdote competentibus tradi*” (Munier, *CCSL* 148 (1963), 200).

179

For instance, Verbraken (1958), 5–6 and Eichenseer (1960), 142–143 suggest that rites took place on Saturdays, starting three weeks before Easter.

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assumptions that there should be a gap of one week between each ritual until Easter Vigil and that Augustine did not preach during the week, although we now know that he did.<sup>180</sup>

### 2.2.3 Catechesis on Two Fundamental Texts

Beyond uncertainties about the concrete organisation of Augustine's pre-baptismal catechesis, it appears clearly that the ritual process of learning the creed and the Lord's Prayer had a central significance in the baptismal preparation. Closely related in the liturgy of initiation and complementary to each other, these texts both provided the basis of the candidates' Christian education and were the climax of the catechumenate. Augustine regularly emphasises that they are short texts to read and hear, easy to remember.<sup>181</sup> In a dictated homily sent to Carthage on the Gospel of John, he describes them as the milk of the little ones, as opposed to solid food, with reference to 1 Cor 3, 1–2.<sup>182</sup> In his sermons to *competentes*, Augustine defines the creed (*symbolum, regula fidei*), following a two-fold meaning of the Greek *symbolon*, either as a contract between traders who are bounded by a pact (*pactus fidei*), implying that candidates bound themselves to God by a similar pact when they recite the creed, or as a token (*signum*) shared by the specific society of believers, separate from pagans and Jews.<sup>183</sup> The creed is described as a short text, which by contrast is full of significance and most comprehensive, a full summary of what *competentes* should believe.<sup>184</sup> An important and frequently quoted passage in connection to the teaching of the creed, used to justify the practice of believing and learning the creed is Rm 10, 9–10 (*Quoniam si confessus fueris in ore tuo quia dominus est Iesus, et credideris in corde tuo quia dominus illum suscitavit a mortuis, salvus eris. Corde enim creditur ad iustitiam, ore autem confessio fit*

180 Dondeyne (1932), 14. For evidence about Augustine preaching outside Sundays, see for instance the series on John and Psalms discussed earlier in this chapter.

181 Augustine, *Ench.* 2, 7; *F. et symb.* 1, 1; S. 56, 3.4; 213, 2; 214, 1; *Symb. cat.* 1, 1.

182 Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 98, 5: *"Intellegendi sunt utique ita primum catechizati, ut lacte aleretur, non solido cibo; cuius lactis ad Hebraeos commemoratur ubertas eis quos volebat cibi soliditate iam passcere (cf. Heb 6, 1–2). [...] Quod autem in lactis commemoratione posuit et doctrina, ipsa est quae per symbolum traditur et orationem dominicam"* (Willems, *CCSL* 36 (1954), 579).

183 Augustine, S. 212, 1 (*pactus*); 214, 12 (*signum*); 215, 6 (distinguishing them from pagans and Jews); see Eichenseer (1960), 9–41; Rodomonti (1995), 128 n. 7. For a collection of texts defining *symbolum/symbolon* see Kinzig (2017a), 1, 61–144.

184 Augustine, S. 212, 1: *"Tempus est ut symbolum accipiatis quo continetur breviter, propter aeternam salutem, omne quod creditur"* (Poque, *sc* 16 (1966), 174); see as well S. 213, 2; 214, 1; *Symb. cat.* 1.1; S. 59, 1.1.



*ad salutem*).<sup>185</sup> Augustine explains in his sermons on the creed that when candidates come to learn it, they in fact already know its substance, as they have received teaching on its contents through Scripture and through sermons in the Church when they were *catechumeni*. The creed thus bears particular significance as the recapitulation of Scripture and of the whole catechumenate, the final concentration and complete revelation of what had been learnt about the Christian faith previously.<sup>186</sup> Acquiring the faith and reciting the creed should progressively transform the lives of catechumens who become faithful, as he summarises already in his *De fide et symbolo* in 393:

This is the faith, consisting of a few short sentences to be remembered in creedal form, which is given to those newly converted to the Christian faith. These brief articles are known to believers so that, by putting their faith in them, they become subject to God, and by being subject to God, they may live righteous lives and through such lives purify their hearts. Then, having purified their hearts, they may succeed in understanding what they believe.<sup>187</sup>

The Lord's Prayer, which is already presented and discussed at the beginning of Lent in Sermon 211 exhorting the audience to peace and concord,<sup>188</sup> was to bring *competentes* to a new membership as much as the creed. Augustine follows on a rich African tradition, notably established through the commentaries on the Lord's prayer written by Tertullian and Cyprian.<sup>189</sup> These earlier writers, who state that the Lord's prayer is a summary of the Gospel, do not give any clues about the liturgical setting in which such explanations could have been

185 For Rm. 10, 9–10: Augustine, S. 214, 1; for Rm. 10, 10 only: *F. et symb.* 1, 1; S. 213, 2; S. 215, 5; *Symb. cat.* 1, 1.

186 Augustine, S. 212, 2: "*Hoc est ergo symbolum quod vobis per scripturas et sermones ecclesiasticos iam catechuminis insinuat est, sed sub hac brevi forma fidelibus confitendum et proficiendum est*" (Poque, SC 16 (1966), 184); S. 214, 1: "*Nam in sanctis scripturis et in sermonibus ecclesiasticis ea multis modis posita soletis audire*" (Verbraken (1962), 14).

187 Augustine, *F. et symb.* 10, 25: "*Haec est fides, quae paucis verbis tenenda in symbolo novellis christianis datur. Quae pauca verba fidelibus nota sunt, ut credendo subiugentur deo, subiugati recte vivant, recte vivendo cor mundent, corde mundato quod credunt intellegant*" (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 32; Campbell, M.G., WSA 1/8 (2005), 174 adapted).

188 Augustine, S. 211, 1–3.

189 For discussion on Cyprian and Tertullian's treatises, see, among others: Grossi (1980), 212–217; Schnurr (1985), 132–134; Grossi (1993), 83–89. See also on Christian prayer from Tertullian to Augustine and on the significance of Origen's influence: Perrone, L., (2011), *La preghiera secondo Origene* (Brescia), 511–644 (609–636 on Augustine).

used at their time, nevertheless they were probably intended for newly baptised Christians.<sup>190</sup> As Bouhot has suggested, Cyprian's and Tertullian's explanations circulated widely, and were mentioned and used, among others, by Hilary of Poitiers and Chromatius of Aquileia in their explanations on the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>191</sup> Augustine himself, already in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount composed in 394, offered a detailed explanation of the Lord's prayer.<sup>192</sup> In his sermons to *competentes*, employing a common imagery applied to catechumens, Augustine explains that they are being conceived by God the Father in the womb of the Mother Church and become His sons.<sup>193</sup> After learning what they should believe, they learn whom and what they should ask, becoming brothers, and living as sons of God to obtain the Father's inheritance.<sup>194</sup> In the case of learning the prayer, however, Augustine makes a noteworthy distinction between reciting (*reddere*) and praying (*orare*). Candidates, before baptism, only learn to recite the prayer, but they pray it only after baptism, when they are born again as sons of God.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, Augustine tells *competentes* that the prayer is a powerful means of forgiveness only after baptism. Their sins are all forgiven in baptism, but for daily sins, and to forgive and be forgiven after their baptism, they will need to resort to the prayer.<sup>196</sup> Thus, the Lord's prayer belongs to the baptised and catechumens cannot pray it and share its benefits before baptism—a ritual boundary that is emphasised to highlight the peculiar and imperfect status of catechumens, as we have seen in Chapter 2.<sup>197</sup> More broadly, the meaning of the Lord's Prayer is summarised by Augustine in his sermons, stating that the first three petitions pertain to eternal life and the three (or four) last ones to human life.<sup>198</sup>

#### 2.2.4 The Importance of Memorisation

In the process of learning these two texts during the baptismal preparation, memorisation and recitation played an essential role. Augustine's preaching particularly insists on memorising the creed without committing it to writ-

190 As noted by de Puniet (1925), 2587.

191 Bouhot (2003), 7.

192 Augustine, *S. dom. m.* 11, 4.15–11.39.

193 Augustine, *Symb. cat.* 1, 1; *S.* 56, 4.5; 57, 2.2, 13.13; 59, 4.7.

194 Augustine, *S.* 57, 2.2; 58, 2.2; 59, 1.2 and 4.7.

195 Augustine, *S.* 59, 4.7: "*Non enim orabitis hanc orationem nisi post baptismum, ad octo enim dies reddituri illam estis non oraturi*" (Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 194–195).

196 Augustine, *S.* 56, 7.11–9.12; 57, 8.8–11.11; 58, 4.5–5.6; 59, 4.7; 213, 9; *Symb. cat.* 7.15–8.16.

197 See Chapter 2, pp. 131–133.

198 Augustine, *S.* 56, 14.19; 57, 6.6–7.7; 58, 10.12.

ing.<sup>199</sup> In the *Retractationes*, revising his *De fide et symbolo*, Augustine notes that “in it the discussion of these things [faith and the creed] is carried out in such a way as not to reproduce the sum of the words which is given to the *competentes* to be memorised”.<sup>200</sup> The sermons on the creed similarly do not give its full continuous text, although the creed was recited as part of the ceremony.<sup>201</sup> A note found in Sermon 214—used as a model for priests—more precisely states that “you know that the creed is usually not written down”.<sup>202</sup> This reluctance to resort to writing may relate to the practice of hiding concrete elements of the initiation to outsiders—what modern scholars describe as the *disciplina arcani*.<sup>203</sup> However, a substantial part of the text of the creed is discussed and quoted in the sermons as they are explained, even in the *De fide et symbolo*.<sup>204</sup> Numerous studies of Augustine’s text of the creed as known from his sermons to *competentes* have attempted to reconstruct it and shown that it corresponds to the Apostle’s Creed. More precisely, Augustine seems to have used two different forms, which can be safely reconstructed only for some of the sermons. The first form, found in Sermon 213 and *De symbolo ad catechumenos* generally corresponds to what scholars have called the Romano-Milanese creed, close to what Ambrose taught to his candidates—among whom Augustine. The second form, in Sermon 215, follows an African type, closer to African creeds attested in Cyprian and sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus and Fulgentius of Ruspe.<sup>205</sup> It

199 Augustine, *Symb. cat.* 1, 1: “*Symbolum nemo scribit ut legi possit, sed ad recensendum, ne forte deleat oblivio quod tradidit diligentia, sit vobis codex vestra memoria*” (Vander Plaetse, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 185); see also S. 212, 2; 213, 2; 214, 1–2.

200 Augustine, *Retr.* 1, 17: “*In quo de rebus ipsis ita disseritur, ut tamen non fiat verborum illa contextio, quae tenenda memoriter competentibus traditur*” (Mutzenbecher, *CCSL* 57 (1984), 52; Ramsey, *WSA* 1/2 (2010), 76 adapted).

201 Augustine, S. 213, 2: “*Hoc est symbolum. Et post symbolum*” (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 443).

202 Augustine, S. 214, 1: “*Quod symbolum nostis quia scribi non solet*” (Verbraken (1962), 14).

203 On the *disciplina arcani* see Chapter 2, 2.2 (pp. 127–130).

204 Despite what is stated in Brons (2017), 174–175. See Augustine, *F. et symb.* (in a mixed form integrating elements from the Nicene creed into the Romano-Milanese creed): 2, 3: “*Credentes itaque in Deum Patrem omnipotentem*”; 3, 3: “*Credimus etiam in Iesum Christum Filium Dei, Patris unigenitum, id est unicum, Dominum nostrum [...] Nos autem in eum credimus per quem facta sunt omnia*”; 4, 6: “*Deus de Deo, Lumen de Lumine*”; 4, 8: “*credentes in eum Dei Filium qui natus est per Spiritum Sanctum ex Virgine Maria*”; 5, 11: “*credimus itaque in eum qui sub Pontio Pilato crucifixus est, et sepultus*”; 5, 12: “*Credimus etiam illum tertio die resurrexisse a mortuis*” etc. (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 6–15).

205 See a detailed discussion of the texts of the creed with references to earlier scholarship in Westra, L.H., (2002), *The Apostles’ Creed: Origin, History, and some Early Commentaries* (Utrecht), 81–84, 87–90, 163–168, 189–192. See also, for Augustine’s sermons on the creed here discussed and attempts to reconstruct it: Kinzig (2017a), 11, 302–307 (S. 213, 214, 215), 308–309 (*F. et symb.*), 309–310 (*Symb. cat.*).

remains difficult to explain why and when—particularly because the sermons are not safely dated—Augustine may have preferred to use one form over the other. Scholars have either put in doubt the authenticity of some of the sermons to explain variation, or suggested that Augustine imported the Milanese form, while also using the local African form.<sup>206</sup> It appears clearly, at least, that the text of the creed was open to adaptation and local variation, and this does not need to have bothered Augustine and his contemporaries.<sup>207</sup>

While ritual secrecy clearly played a role, the access provided to the text of the creed in Augustine's sermons shows that there were other reasons beyond the *disciplina arcani* not to entrust it to writing.<sup>208</sup> Augustine's Sermon 212 provides a useful discussion: as already emphasised by a number of scholars, the prohibition is put under the authority of a quotation from Jer 31, 33 foretelling the coming of a new unwritten law.<sup>209</sup> The new law brought by the New Testament is written in hearts.<sup>210</sup> Instead of writing the creed, Augustine suggests that candidates should recite it everyday, before going to bed, in the morning, and, after baptism, continue to recite it for their whole life, whenever possible.<sup>211</sup> The full and continuous text of the creed is not to be written or read

206 See, among others, Caspari (1869), 258–282; Kattenbusch (1894), 91–97; Badcock, F.J., (1933), 'Le credo primitif d'Afrique', *RBen* 45, 3–9; Poque, *SC* 116 (1966), 59–64; Rodomonti (1995), 133–137.

207 As noted in Westra (2002), 83–84; Brons (2017), 175–176.

208 The Manichaean Faustus shows knowledge of the creed, see Augustine, *C. Faust.* XXIII, 2: "*Nam catholicam fidem novimus; quae tanto longe abest ab hac professione Matthaei, quanto procul est et a vero, siquidem symbolum vestrum ita se habeat, ut credatis in Iesum Christum filium Dei*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 25/1 (1891), 708–709).

209 Augustine, *S.* 212, 2: "*Nec ut eadem verba teneatis, ullo modo scribere debetis, sed audiendo perdiscere, nec cum tenueritis scribere, sed memoria semper tenere atque recolere. Quicquid enim in symbolo audituri estis, iam divinis sanctarum scripturarum litteris continetur et omnia carptim ubi opus erat soletis audire. Sed quod ita collectum et in formam quandam redactum non licet scribi, commemoratio fit promissionis Dei ubi per prophetam praeunians testamentum novum dixit: Hoc est testamentum meum quod orbinabo eis post dies illos, dicit dominus, dans leges meas in mentem eorum et in cordibus eorum scribam eas (Jer 31, 33)*" (Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 183–184); see Kattenbusch (1900), 447; van der Meer (1961), 359; de Latte (1975), 201.

210 Augustine, *S.* 212, 2: "*Huius rei significandae causa, audiendo symbolum, non in tabulis vel in ulla alia materia sed in cordibus scribitur*" (Poque, *SC* 16 (1966), 184). Jerome, *Contra Iohannem* 28 draws the same opposition: "*In symbolo fidei et spei nostrae, quod ab apostolis traditum est, non scribitur in charta et atramento, sed in tabulis cordis carnalibus*" (Feiertag, J.-L., *CCSL* 79A (1999), 50).

211 Augustine, *S.* 215, 1: "*Acceperitis ergo, et reddidistis, quod animo et corde semper retinere debetis, quod in stratis vestris dicatis, quod in plateis cogitetis, et quod inter cibos non obliviscamini; in quo etiam dormientes corpore, corde vigiletis*" (Verbraken (1958), 18); *Symb. cat.* 1, 1: "*Accipite regulam fidei, quod symbolum dicitur. Et cum acceperitis, in corde scribite, et quo-*

aloud, but learnt and recited from memory because it is an initiatory text, fully part of the baptised identity. The creed acts as a mirror: repeating it frequently will lead the newly baptised to reflect on whether their way of life is in harmony with their faith.<sup>212</sup> This shows the significance put into the preparation leading to baptism for the individual's religious belonging. Rituals, and particularly memorisation and repetition, work as an essential tool in the process of building Christian membership.

Concretely, this emphasis on memorising the creed is even better understood by comparing it with Augustine's remarks regarding the learning of the Lord's prayer: Augustine explains that candidates should not worry too much about exactly remembering the Lord's Prayer, since it is not recited by each candidate at Easter Vigil but only during mass after baptism, together with the faithful. Moreover, the prayer is repeated at each and every mass and thus learnt more fully throughout one's life, while the creed, by contrast, is not part of the mass and is never repeated afterwards and should therefore be most carefully memorised.<sup>213</sup> While emphasising the significance of memorisation and recitation, Augustine also acknowledges that it may have created anxiety or proved difficult to achieve for some candidates. In the *Confessiones* he recalls that in Rome candidates were given the opportunity to recite the creed in private rather than before the whole assembly.<sup>214</sup> In one of his sermons handing over the creed to candidates, Augustine tried to reassure the *competentes*, explaining that the clergymen were fathers (*patres*), not brutal teachers of grammar (*grammatici*). He also added that the relatives (*parentes*), the godparents, members of the faithful, would help candidates reciting and memorising the creed at home, performing vigils and praying.<sup>215</sup>

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*tidie dicite apud vos: antequam dormiatis, antequam procedatis, vestro symbolo vos munite*" (Vander Plaetse, *CCSL* 46 (1969), 185). See also a lengthy development in S. 58, 11.13.

212 Augustine, S. 58, 11.13: "*Commemora fidem tuam, inspicere te: sit tamquam speculum tibi symbolum tuum. Vide ibi, si credis omnia quae te credere confiteris, et gaude cotidie in fide tua*" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 213). On the importance of oral performance in the process see Harrison (2013), chapter 4.

213 Augustine, S. 58, 11.13: "*Modo enim nisi teneatis symbolum in ecclesia, in populo symbolum cotidie non auditis*" (Verbraken et al., *CCSL* 41Aa (2008), 212). The creed became part of the mass only progressively in the West; the practice is first attested in sixth-century Spain, see Bernard, Ph., (1995), 'L'origine des chants de la messe selon la tradition musicale du chant romain ancien, improprement dit "chant vieux-romain"', in Triacca, A.M., Pistoia, A., (eds.), (1995), *L'eucharistie: célébrations, rites, piétés: Conférences Saint-Serge, 41<sup>e</sup> Semaine d'études liturgiques*, Paris, 28 Juin–1 Juillet 1994 (Rome), 19–97 (at 40); Kinzig (2017b), 316–326.

214 Augustine, *Conf.* VIII, 2.5.

215 Augustine, S. 213, 11: "*Parentes vestri, qui vos suscipiunt, doceant vos, ut parati inveniamini, et quomodo vigiletis ad gallicantum, ad orationes quas hic celebratis. Iam incipit vobis et ipsum*

The significance of this recitation in Augustine's Africa more broadly is also highlighted in the hagiography of Stephen, as Dativus is said to have been brought back to life after a vision in which he was asked to recite the creed and the Lord's prayer that had been handed over to him—"give back what you have received".<sup>216</sup> More broadly, during Augustine's time, in connection to its significance in the conversion process, the creed is increasingly employed in miracle stories.<sup>217</sup> Failing to correctly recite the creed and only trusting the written word could lead to lose speech altogether. In a letter probably written to Alypius between 428 and 430,<sup>218</sup> Augustine described the failed attempts of the reluctant former pagan Dioscorus in learning the creed and the curses he had to endure before he finally committed it to memory:

He did not memorise the creed, or perhaps he refused to memorise it and excused himself as unable. God will know which it was. Now after all the celebration for his reception into the Church, he became paralysed in many and almost all his members and even his tongue. Then, having been admonished by a dream, he confessed in writing that he was told that this happened because he did not recite the creed from memory. After that confession the functions of all his members, except his tongue, were restored. He nonetheless stated in writing that he had in that time of trial learned the creed and therefore held it in memory.<sup>219</sup>

Punished for his lack of commitment, the speechless Dioscorus would not be allowed by God to recite the creed anymore, but only to write about his faith.

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*symbolum hic praeberi, ut diligenter teneatis: nemo trepidet, nemo trepidando non reddat. Securi estote, patres vestri sumus, non habemus ferulas et virgas grammaticorum*" (Morin, *MA* 1 (1930), 449–450).

216 *De miraculis sancti Stephani* 1, 6: "Redde quod accepisti!" [...] 'Ne symbolum iubet ut reddam?' Et illo dicente: 'Redde'; se ex ordine symbolum reddidisse et adiecisse: 'Si iubet, et orationem Dominicam reddo; atque illo annuente reddidit' (Meyers (2006), 288). For discussion of this passage see Kinzig, W., (2018), *Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis. Leistung und Grenzen eines christlichen Fundamentaltextes* (Berlin), 2–3.

217 See Kinzig (2018), 2–3.

218 For the dating see Pignot (2016), 473–476.

219 Augustine, *Ep.* 227: "Symbolum non tenuerat aut fortasse tenere recusauerat et se non potuisse excusauerat. deus uiderit. Iam tamen post festa omnia receptionis suae in paralysin soluitur multis ac paene omnibus membris tunc somnio admonitus confitens per scripturam ob hoc sibi dictum esse accidisse, quod symbolum non reddiderit. Post illam confessionem redduntur officia membrorum omnium nisi linguae solius. Se tamen didicisse symbolum ideoque memoria iam tenere [...]" (Goldbacher, *CSEL* 57 (1911), 482–483; Teske, *WSA* 11/4 (2005), 103–104).

### 2.2.5 The Limits of the Catechumenate

Dioscorus' case, and Augustine's way of telling it, show us that while he saw the catechumenate as a fundamental opportunity to teach Christianity, he was aware of the limits of this period of teaching and ritual initiation. Further remarks found in a polemical context show that Augustine understood the catechumenate only as a first step in the Christians' learning process, which provided them with basic knowledge of Christianity, emphasising the uncertainties that remained after the candidates were initiated and the room left for improvement. In his polemical treatise *De baptismo*, written against the Donatists, Augustine underlines that baptism can be validly conferred while the candidates may still lack the "right" faith (*fides recta*): they learn the correct words of the creed but they have wrong beliefs, or have read heretical books without noticing their errors. Augustine notes that these baptised individuals may later realise their mistake after reading, hearing or discussing the right faith, but would need to be corrected and not rebaptised.<sup>220</sup> In the specific case of Augustine's polemic over rebaptism, the emphasis on the limited efficacy of ritual performance for community building relates to his argument of the validity of baptism even among heretics.<sup>221</sup> This, however, is more broadly in line with Augustine's understanding of the rituals of initiation as a first step in the long perfection of the self continuing after baptism. In the *De fide et symbolo*, Augustine states about the creed:

It is for the benefit of beginners and those still on milk food (cf. 1 Cor 3, 2); reborn in Christ, they have yet to be strengthened by a detailed spiritual study and knowledge of the divine scriptures and so are presented with the essentials of faith in a few sentences. However, for those who have advanced further and who, imbued with true humility and genuine charity, aspire to the divine teaching, the creed would of necessity have to be explained in much greater detail. No small number of heretics have attempted to insinuate their poisonous doctrines into those brief

220 Augustine, *Bapt.* 111, 14.19: "*Fieri enim potest ut homo integrum habeat sacramentum et perversam fidem, sicut fieri potest ut integra teneat verba symboli et tamen non recte credat sive de ipsa trinitate sive de resurrectione vel aliquid aliud. [...] Numquidnam ergo, si in ipsa catholica baptizatus postea legendo audiendo et pacifice disserendo ipso domino revelante cognoverit aliter se antea credidisse quam debuit, denuo baptizandus est?*" (Petschenig, *CSEL* 51 (1908), 208–209).

221 This is essential in the polemic against Donatists (see for instance Augustine *C. litt. Pet.* 111, 8.9), but corresponds more broadly to Augustine's understanding of ritual efficacy (see the same emphasis on the validity of baptism, discussing the case of infant baptism, in *Ep.* 98, 1 and 5).

sentences which constitute the creed. But the divine mercy has resisted and continues to resist such people through the influence of spiritually-minded men, who have been found worthy not only to receive and believe the Catholic faith embodied in these few words but also, with the Lord's enlightenment, to understand and possess a knowledge of it.<sup>222</sup>

The purpose of the *De fide et symbolo*—rejecting the views of heretics on the creed—brings Augustine to underline that the ritual initiation before baptism that has been the focus of this chapter was not enough to create a full sense of belonging and teach the faith in detail. The ceremonies of *traditio* and *redditio* of the creed only provided an overview accessible to all, but the baptised would require further learning. Catechumens could still hold wrong beliefs after baptism as they did when they entered the catechumenate. These pragmatic remarks show the progressive nature of the integration of catechumens and newly baptised into the community. At the same time, the yearly initiation of new candidates provided a strong means of refreshing the Christian education of the whole community.

### 3 Conclusion

In Augustine's Africa, the baptismal preparation was a complex process of integration. Candidates were repeatedly tested and received baptism only after a rite of inscription and examination, a set of penitential practices, repeated catechesis and exorcisms, and recitation from memory of the creed and Lord's prayer. The best known rites of the initiation, the *traditio*/*redditio*, provide a glimpse into the long and repeated catechesis, the fears of candidates, the role of godparents, and the significance of properly learning what was taught. Augustine's emphasis on impeccable behaviour, abstinence and examinations, the links between exorcism and catechesis and the significance of memor-

222 Augustine, *F. et symb.* 1.1: "*Est autem catholica fides in symbolo nota fidelibus memoriaeque mandata quanta res passa est brevitate sermonis: ut incipientibus atque lactantibus eis (cf. 1 Cor 3, 2), qui in Christo renati sunt, nondum scripturarum divinarum diligentissima et spiritali tractatione atque cognitione roboratis paucis verbis credendum constitueretur, quod multis verbis exponendum esset proficientibus et ad divinam doctrinam certa humilitatis atque caritatis firmitate surgentibus. Sub ipsis ergo verbis paucis in symbolo constitutis plerique haeretici venena sua occultare conati sunt: quibus restitit et resistit divina misericordia per spiritales viros, qui catholicam fidem non tantum in illis verbis accipere et credere, sed etiam domino revelante intellegere atque cognoscere meruerunt*" (Zycha, *CSEL* 41 (1900), 3–4; Campbell, *WSA* 1/8 (2005), 155).



isation show that the initiation was designed to touch upon every aspect of the lives of candidates to transform them. This process more broadly involved the whole community of the baptised as well, offering an opportunity for self-assessment and transformation through the testing of a group of selected and singled out individuals. Godparents connected candidates to the wider community, serving as models and witnesses to the transformation of their *competentes*. Analogies with other areas of daily life, in which individuals similarly had to cohere and define practices and behaviour, as the connections drawn with military and commercial interactions, show how religious initiation constituted one of the core transformations in the lives of late antique individuals. At the same time, however, Augustine provides a lucid testimony to the yearly initiation process, particularly emphasising in a context of rivalry between Christian communities, the limits of the instruction provided during the catechumenate and the need for improvement and correction of wrong beliefs after baptism.

Reassessing the evidence about specific ritual practices has shown that the rite of enrolment was probably associated to a first intense session of exorcism described in Sermon 216. This examination of candidates took place within a window of admission that was wider than is generally thought. Gathering from the city and from the nearby countryside, the *competentes* were part of a network in which godparents played a major role during the examination sessions. Moreover, the examination of *competentes* mentioned in the *De fide et operibus* should not necessarily be understood as a single session: it appears more likely that *competentes* were examined and exorcised on a regular basis, first at the time of inscription, then during Lent, notably in connection to the rites of teaching and learning the creed and the Lord's Prayer.<sup>223</sup> These ritual sessions were an intimate combination of ritual actions and catechesis.

Beyond these insights, this study has also shown that most details about practices of the baptismal preparation escape the historian. The time, location and frequency of the sketched practices of initiation, as well as the way clergymen, godparents and candidates experienced the whole process are in general very difficult to ascertain on the basis of the preserved evidence. Nothing certain can be said about the procedure for the penitential rites, how catechesis and rites of exorcism were structured, and how frequently they were imparted. While the learning of the creed and the Lord's Prayer are better known to us, gaps remain in our evidence preventing a full overview of how and when the creed and the Lord's Prayer were learnt and recited by candidates. A close

223 Augustine, *F. et op.* 6, 9; 27, 49.

examination of the sermons has shown that practices may have varied, while a specific calendar for the ceremonies cannot be reconstructed.

After following Augustine's *competentes* up to the climax and end of the catechumenate in the weeks preceding Easter and baptism, the next chapter will put Augustine's evidence in a wider context. The other available African evidence makes it possible to further restore the richness and variety of ritual practices. Augustine's numerous references to catechumens find clear parallels in the more scarce African evidence preserved from his lifetime and in the century after his death. Sermons and council proceedings in the next chapter and letters from the early sixth-century discussed in Chapter Six will show continuity and demonstrate that the catechumenate was the framework for the progressive integration of members until the sixth century at least, and that, at the same time, it often challenged clerics attempting to build a unified community.

## Councils, Preaching and the Catechumenate in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Africa

This chapter explores the catechumenate in lesser known African sources to shed light on the experience, impact and significance of initiation in the world of Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries. The balance between Augustine's influence, common heritage and local traditions is particularly difficult to assess. This chapter reinforces the conclusions drawn against the assumption that Augustine offers evidence for a sort of standard practice and further shows the limits of the available sources to reconstruct the ancient catechumenate. It also argues against the opposing view that Augustine's texts would not be representative of widely spread African traditions and ideas but only reflect Augustine's idiosyncrasy. Rather, Augustine and other African texts all relate to an African tradition of initiation that has strong commonalities, particularly in terms of liturgical language and ideas, and at the same time, the initiation of catechumens, both its rituals and catechesis, was not normalised into a standard pattern but followed local and changing practices. The study of African evidence beyond Augustine is particularly needed because of the imposing mark of the bishop of Hippo on any study of late antique Africa. The analysis of neglected African texts underlines that initiation practices need to be considered within a wider world, where there was no normalisation of rituals but variation, adaptation and creativity. African sources, be they great figures such as Augustine or lesser known texts, have all to be understood within this framework to draw a more accurate picture of the catechumenate as a constantly evolving organisation, shaped by a context of recurrent religious polemics, requiring Christian communities to define their boundaries. This chapter aims to show that African sources provide consistent evidence for a context of competition with rival churches, which gave the impulse for the development of intense and diverse initiatory rites and catecheses, and created the need for defining normative practices and beliefs. The main challenge in writing the history of the late antique catechumenate is to recover a sense of the capacity of local clerics to improvise and innovate within a lively context, far beyond the limited evidence available today as a result of the medieval selection of material.

This chapter is divided into three sections, first looking at relatively well-dated texts, then examining evidence more difficult to situate. I first discuss ref-

erences to *catechumeni* in council rulings and show that there is only rare evidence of church legislation preserved, which however illustrates that attempts were already made in the fourth century to set normative practices in a context of rivalry with the Donatists. Extending research beyond the *catechumeni*, the study of the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus then provides an opportunity of exploring further, after my analysis of Augustine's evidence in the preceding chapter, how candidates were prepared for baptism in late antique Africa. Focusing on this rich body of evidence shall shed new light on shared traditions and local originality. These sermons mostly focus on a remarkable ritual of renunciation and profession of faith connected to vivid polemics against heretics, offering an alternative and informative view on initiation very close to Augustine in terms of language, ideas and exegesis, but pertaining to a liturgical organisation that is not described in sermons currently attributed to Augustine. Finally, I examine a small selection of anonymous sermons, which contain complementary information on the preparation for baptism and may have been preached in late antique North Africa. While discussing issues surrounding their plausible African origin, I show that these sermons cast further light on common features and changing practices. Particularly, the teaching and learning of psalms before baptism appears as a distinctive feature that was more widespread than it has been assumed.

## 1 Canons of Councils

Numerous canons promulgated at Church councils were put into writing in Africa from the third to the sixth century at least. Their history of transmission is particularly intricate: most of the preserved documents stem from collections already circulating in the fifth century, the material being reworked and transmitted in later centuries through various collections, particularly the successive sixth- and seventh-century compilations of Dionysius Exiguus, Ferrandus of Carthage, Cresconius and the *Collectio Hispana*.<sup>1</sup> Without entering into this complex matter and related scholarly debates, this section focuses on relevant information about *catechumeni* found in the African acts of coun-

1 See with further bibliography: Munier, Ch., (1972), 'Vers une édition nouvelle des Canons Africains (345–525)', *REAug* 18, 249–259; Munier, Ch., (ed.), *CCSL* 149 (1974), v–xii; Munier, Ch., (1986), 'Canon' and 'Concilium (Concilia)', *AL* 1, fasc. 1–2, 1085–1099, at 1088–1089; Munier, Ch., (1987), *Vie conciliaire et collections canoniques en Occident, IVe–XIe siècles* (London). See as well for a recent overview: Perrin, M.-Y., (2016), 'Non solo Agostino. I Padri africani nella vicenda dottrinale e nella elaborazione canonistica della Chiesa latina', in Alzati (2016), 95–123.

cils and canonical collections dating from the fourth and fifth century, mainly edited by Charles Munier.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the canons of the councils of Carthage (345/48 and 390), Thela (418) and Hippo (427) that are edited as documents on their own, the rest of the legislation, mostly promulgated in the years between 393 and 419, is not preserved in the form of single council canons but as abridged versions in broader collections composed on the basis of the original councils. These are in particular the *Breviarium Hipponense* (393) composed in 397 in two versions and later enlarged, the *Gesta de nomine Apiarii* (419) including earlier legislation also expanded later, and the abbreviated extracts from the Carthage Register, covering legislation from 393 to 419. Most of this fifth-century evidence thus corresponds to the primacy of Aurelius of Carthage and Augustine's time as a priest and bishop.

A close perusal of this whole set of documents shows that there are very few rulings about catechumens, with in fact only one canon mentioning catechumens, promulgated at the general council of Hippo (393). It is noteworthy that almost nothing is said about the status of catechumens in churches and how the catechumenate should be organised. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that there were no regulations on the matter, particularly knowing of the significance of debates on initiation during the period, as shown in the preceding chapters. In light of the very fragmentary and abridged character of the medieval transmission of the canons of councils, a great number of them has certainly been lost. Despite the conservative and repetitive character—canon are often reissued—of the African legislation, partially compensating the fragmentary state of the evidence, several councils were held for which no or little evidence is preserved.<sup>3</sup> Sources from other regions of the Latin West, in particular the canons of the so-called council of Elvira, suggest that in Africa too there may have been more substantial canonical rules focusing on catechumens.<sup>4</sup> Avoiding speculation based on the state of the evidence, it is more significant to notice that the only preserved canon about catechumens is puzzling and difficult to interpret. In fact, the canon seems to shed light on the attempts, during Aurelius' primacy, corroborating our investigation of Augustine, at normalising the organisation of the catechumenate, in particular by drawing clear lines in terms of rituals between the *catechumeni* and the *fideles*.

2 Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974) with the remarks of Mordek, H., (1986), *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung* 72, 366–386. The Acts of the Conference of Carthage (411) do not provide evidence about *catechumeni*.

3 Munier (1972), 249–251.

4 See Vilella (2013).

### 1.1 Canon 3 in the Breviarium Hipponense

The canon is part of the lost proceedings of the council held at Hippo the 8th October 393, preserved in the abbreviated version (*Breviarium*) that was written for the council of Carthage in two versions during August 397.<sup>5</sup> The council of Hippo was convened to gather a great number of bishops from all regions of Africa and was presided over by Aurelius of Carthage. Augustine was deeply involved: not only did it take place in his own town, but Augustine opened the council with a speech on the creed, the *De fide et symbolo*.<sup>6</sup> The council had the aim of reforming African churches on a large scale, showing Aurelius' and Augustine's determination, in the context of the Donatist schism, to reinforce their party in terms of church discipline from the very beginning of their ministry. The council was held in a context of competition with the Donatists who were in a position of strength in Hippo at the time.<sup>7</sup> Canons legislate on several matters affecting all aspects of ecclesiastical hierarchy and organisation, ordering churches to convene councils each year and particularly focusing on rules for the various orders of the clergy and their ordination. Liturgical practices are also an important concern of the council. It legislates on prayer, the Eucharist, fasting and baptism.<sup>8</sup> Canon 3, the only one focusing on catechumens, orders:

That as well during the especially solemn days of Easter the rite (*sacramentum*) should not be given to catechumens (*catechumenis*), except the customary salt (*salis*). Because, as the faithful (*fideles*) do not change

5 Cross, F.L., (1961), 'History and Fiction in the African Canons', *JTS* 12 (1961), 227–247, at 229–233; Munier (1972), 255.

6 Augustine, *Retr.* 1, 17. Contrary to what is stated in Hefele, C., (1908), *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, volume 2 (Paris), part 1, 82 and others, Possidius never mentions this council: the reference given is to the Maurists' life of Augustine taking its information from Augustine's *Retractationes*.

7 Augustine, *Ep.* 22, 2 and 4 makes clear that he exhorted Aurelius to convene councils in order to reform the African churches. For an attempt to trace the background for these reforms see Merdinger, J., (2009), 'On the Eve of the Council of Hippo, 393', *AS* 40/1, 27–36; Merdinger, J. (2017), 'Defying Donatism Subtly: Augustine's and Aurelius' Liturgical Canons at the Council of Hippo', *SP* 98, 273–286 (arguing that there were specific Donatist rites, however on the basis of little evidence).

8 For a detailed presentation of the material from this and other African councils see Sabw Kanyang, J.-A., (2000), *Episcopus et plebs. L'évêque et la communauté ecclésiale dans les conciles africains (345–525)* (Bern-Berlin et al.). On reforms in the liturgy see Klöckener, M., (2002), 'Liturgiereform in der nordafrikanischen Kirche des 4./5. Jahrhunderts', in Klöckener, M., Kranemann, B., (eds.), (2002), *Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes* (Münster), 121–168, mentioning Canon 3 at 159–160.

rites (*sacramenta*) during those days, catechumens too should not change [rites].<sup>9</sup>

Many conjectures have been made regarding the forbidden *sacramentum*: some scholars have suggested that it refers to honey and milk—given to newly baptised as is clear from Canon 23b—, salted bread or *Eulogia*, while many point to the Eucharist without providing compelling arguments.<sup>10</sup> However, the content of the canon has not been considered in detail nor compared to the other canons and contemporary evidence. There is no evidence to suggest that Canon 3 would point to the Eucharist: it would imply that some churches across Africa freely gave the Eucharist to catechumens during Easter time without admitting them to baptism, a practice which has no attested parallel during the period and goes deeply against the liturgical connection between baptism and the Eucharist—mentioned in several instances in Augustine as seen in previous chapters, and widespread in late antique sources more generally.

### 1.2 *Old Interpretations and a New Hypothesis*

As in the case of the mention of a *sacramentum* in the *De catechizandis rudibus*, modern scholarly interpretations of the canon are all based on the idea that *sacramentum* alludes to a single rite performed on its own, either the equivalent of a modern sacrament or more specifically the administration of some edible item in contrast with salt. However, the other canons in the *Breviarium* which refer to a specific rite usually identify it by its name or add an explanatory sentence. For instance, the custom of offering honey and milk to the newly baptised is mentioned in Canon 23b and distinguished from the Eucharist. Canon 4 forbids the administration of baptism and the Eucharist to the dead, while Canon 23b speaks of “*lac et mel*” and “*sacramentum dominici corporis et sanguinis*” and Canon 4 employs the specific terms *eucharistia* and *baptizari*.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Canon 3 only refers to a *sacramentum* that is best translated as “rite” rather than “sacrament”. It is relevant here to recall that in Augustine’s writings, *sacramentum* is often applied to the Eucharist or baptism but also employed

9 *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 3: “*Ut etiam per sollemnissimos paschales dies sacramentum catechumenis non detur, nisi solitum salis; quia, si fideles per illos dies sacramenta non mutant, nec catechumenos oportet mutare*” (Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974), 33, own translation).

10 Already de l’Aubespine (1623), 437–440. For an overview of interpretations see Bingham (1840), 290–293; Latham (1982), 96–98, see as well studies listed in Chapter 2 note 3. Gaudemet, J., (1958), *L’Église et l’Empire romain (Ive–ve siècles)* (Paris), 58 n. 8 followed by Sabw Kanyang (2000), 200–201 still suggests the Eucharist, as does McGowan, A., (1999), *Ascetic Eucharists. Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford), 123.

11 *Breviarium Hipponense*, canon 4 and 23b (Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974), 33–34 and 40).

more broadly to refer to other rites or sets of rites. In the case of catechumens it refers to the rites performed by them as a sort of counterpart to those of the baptised.<sup>12</sup> The canon itself implies that *sacramentum* entails the broader meaning of “rite” rather than “sacrament”, since it is opposed to the reception of salt “only” and refers, in the plural, to the *sacramenta* of the faithful.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that this canon aims at ruling on the correct calendar for initiation, since rites for catechumens are compared with those for the faithful to highlight that no changes should happen “as well (*etiam*)” during the Easter period. “The solemn days of Easter” most probably point to the period from Lent until after Easter, at least the first week and perhaps until Pentecost.<sup>14</sup>

It seems plausible to argue for a new hypothesis: *sacramentum* in Canon 3 would refer broadly to the full initiation cycle to become a *fidelis*, in particular the learning and recitation of the creed perhaps with other texts, baptism, the Eucharist, anointment and other associated rites. It does not matter whether legislators, by using *sacramentum* in the singular, had the specific rites like baptism or the Eucharist more specifically in mind: the two rites were closely intertwined—as is clear in Canon 4—since they were administered at the same occasion to the candidates becoming *fideles*.<sup>15</sup> Canon 3 thus seems to prohibit ordinary *catechumeni*, individuals who have not begun the baptismal preparation, from receiving the initiation rites of the faithful during Easter time *as well*. It would aim at enforcing, as canonical practices, on one hand the process of admission of *catechumeni* as candidates for baptism (*competentes*), and on the other hand, the administration of baptism, the first Eucharist and other rites at Easter making the *competentes* into *fideles* after a preparation during Lent. The canon would thus forbid the baptism of *catechumeni* without a proper preparation. This implies that in some churches *catechumeni* were initiated in the wake of the Easter celebrations, avoiding the Lenten preparation. The canon would rule that catechumens should not be admitted to baptism during Easter time but keep receiving the customary salt (*solitum salis*).

Klößener has argued for another interpretation: the canon would rule about only admitting newcomers to the catechumenate at Easter time, because the salt was given once only at the rite of admission into the catechumenate.<sup>16</sup>

12 See Chapter 2, 1.2.3, pp. 111–114.

13 Sabw Kanyang (2000), 201 n. 30 notes that various rites could be implied.

14 For this period as an extension of Easter day see Bradshaw, P., Johnson, M.E., (2011), *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (London-Collegeville MN), 69–86.

15 In *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 39, the plural *sacramenta* is employed twice to refer to the rites performed at baptism.

16 Klößener (1998), 156; Sabw Kanyang (2000), 213 even suggests that the canon aims at resurrecting the giving of salt as a forgotten practice.



However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the giving of salt was most likely repeated and not limited to the admission, and has to point to catechumens in general.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the canon itself seems to constitute evidence of this repetition: *catechumenus* needs to have a clear technical meaning in order to be relevant as a distinction and it refers to catechumens, not newcomers. Such an interpretation is consistent with Augustine's technical use of *catechumenus* for individuals who have been admitted into the catechumenate but have not entered the second stage of preparation for baptism—when they would be called *competentes*. It seems plausible therefore that the canon rules in favour of a proper Lenten baptismal preparation, which was indeed a concern of Augustine, as shown from his sermons and the *De fide et operibus*. In the preceding chapter, we have also seen that the admission window for new candidates enrolling to prepare for baptism was probably wider than generally assumed in scholarship, extending into the first weeks of Lent. Reading this canon against this practice gives further weight to our interpretation: ruling in favour of a proper baptismal preparation, clerics at the council of 393 may have aimed at preventing candidates from enrolling too late, and churches from admitting them to baptism without suitable training.

Other canons show the same attempt to control the administration of baptism, clearly promoting a standard for initiation and only permitting quick baptism in emergency cases, which are themselves closely monitored. Canon 32 allows for emergency baptism but rules that sick individuals who “cannot reply by themselves” can only be baptised with the help of witnesses to support the candidate's commitment.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Canon 39 permits the baptism of infants who were taken captive by barbarians only when there are no witnesses to testify that they were baptised.<sup>19</sup> Canon 4 forbidding the administration of baptism to the dead has to be understood in the same context: it refers to individuals who died shortly before they could receive the rites and were baptised after their death. Relating this evidence to Augustine's prohibition to bury a dead catechumen where *sacramenta* are celebrated makes it easier to understand why some would have baptised dead catechumens to obtain a decent burial.<sup>20</sup> All these canons legislate against uncontrolled baptism. Canon 3, in the same vein, puts particular emphasis on distinguishing individuals at various stages of commitment within Christian communities, thus aiming to regulate and standardise the organisation of the catechumenate. Augustine's strict

17 See Chapter 2 note 3 and pp. 111–114.

18 *Breviarium Hipponense*, Canon 32.

19 See a discussion in Sabw Kanyang (2000), 202–205.

20 Augustine, *S. 142aug*, *post tractatum* (= Dolbeau 7).

distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles* in terms of rituals in his sermons and works well corresponds to this canonical legislation. Such a canon certainly provides noteworthy evidence of the attempts to standardise practices during the episcopate of Aurelius, with Augustine's support. Canon 3 aimed at standardising existing diversity: by legislating against change ("*non mutant, nec catechumenos oportet mutare*") it rejects diversity as innovation and promotes its own standard. Later, the council of Carthage of 525 and canon collections, in particular Ferrandus' *Breviarium* written between 523 and 548,<sup>21</sup> incorporated and repeated this ruling,<sup>22</sup> demonstrating that the canon enjoyed a wide diffusion in later centuries.

### 1.3 Conclusion

In summary, Canon 3 of the *Breviarium hipponense* may perhaps be described as the tip of an iceberg, as a rule emerging from diverging practices. Augustine's more abundant evidence provided the basis to suggest that this canon was an attempt to enforce the Lenten baptismal preparation and draw a clear distinction between the catechumens and the faithful in a context in which converts were freely initiated. Rites seem to have been more freely administered than may be generally assumed from the evidence in Augustine, and councils in late fourth-century Africa were precisely meant to create new legislation standardising the catechumenate into a single well-established organisation. It is noteworthy that such legislation is promulgated in a context of rivalry with the Donatists: defining the Catholic discipline in matters of initiation was crucial particularly knowing that the opposing parties fought over the issue of rebaptism and that baptism had been a recurrent concern of councils since Cyprian's time. Promoting a proper Lenten preparation in competition with Donatist practices was essential to build a sense of belonging to the community in this context of division. Augustine's recurrent debates over the catechumenate with the Donatists and the fight for members sheds light on why legislating on such matters would have been essential. The extent to which these attempts to set clear norms were successful and the role played by religious polemics in the drive towards uniformity can only be appreciated by considering the long term evolution, which will be the focus of the next chapter. Indeed, Canon 32 on emergency baptism quoted above was precisely the starting point of a dis-

21 Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974), 284–286; Perrin, M.-Y., (2019), 'La *Concordia canonum* de Cresconius: un réexamen', in Lizzi Testa, R., Marconi, G., (eds.), (2019), *The Collectio Avellana and Its Revivals* (NewCastle), 487–505 at 495–496.

22 Ferrandus, *Breviarium canonum*, Canon 226 (Munier, *CCSL* 149 (1974), 305). It is also found in the *collectio Hispana* (ibid. 330).

cussion on the efficacy of baptism and the necessity of the catechumenate in sixth-century letters exchanged between Ferrandus and Fulgentius. The next section will further show that in the fifth century, the fight against opposing religious groups, particularly Arians, played a major role in initiation practices, which were developed and adapted locally in connection with this evolving context.

## 2 The Sermons Attributed to Quodvultdeus of Carthage and the Baptismal Preparation in Fifth-Century Africa

Sermons are an essential source to study how catechumens were initiated in late antique Africa. Beyond Augustine, the only relevant collection currently attributed to an African author in the fifth century is that of the thirteen sermons of Quodvultdeus—compared to more than eight hundred sermons of Augustine. There is a noteworthy imbalance in terms of the preserved evidence, reflecting the results of the medieval transmission of texts on the catechumenate: none of the sermons preserved contain references to *catechumeni*, for which Augustine provided valuable evidence. However, nine of the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus are preached for the baptismal preparation during Lent, before Easter, some mentioning the rite of enrolment of candidates (*“dare nomen”*) to start the preparation.<sup>23</sup> They contain unique details on the rites of initiation and embrace essential steps of the preparation that would be otherwise little known. Thus, they are an invaluable source for the initiation process, which has few parallels in late antique Africa. In comparison, while Augustine is particularly informative on the yearly calls of the bishop to invite candidates and on rules of admission into the baptismal preparation—as we have seen—his *corpus* only preserves ten complete sermons and two fragments preached to candidates during the baptismal preparation, which have been extensively studied. However, they do not provide detailed descriptions of the central rituals of learning the creed and renouncing the Devil. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus offer therefore an opportunity to put Augustine's better-known material in a broader perspective and provide a fresh study of the baptismal preparation in Africa.

23 *De cantico novo* (= *Cant*), 1.22; *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1 (= *Gr* 1), 11.5. In this study, I quote the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus on the basis of Braun's edition (*CCSL* 60 (1976), 229–470), providing both the paragraph number and sub-number, the first in Roman and the second in Arabic numerals.

Few studies have taken these sermons into account for the history of the catechumenate. They all accept the attribution of the set to Quodvultdeus of Carthage and often use the sermons as companions to Augustine's sermons, filling the gaps found in either source to suggest a common African pattern of initiation, thus standardising sources.<sup>24</sup> Only a few scholars have envisaged Quodvultdeus's sermons as witnesses of otherwise little-known rites.<sup>25</sup> It is essential, therefore, to examine these sermons in a new perspective that restores their originality. After showing that there is little ground to attribute the sermons to Quodvultdeus as a single author, I situate each of them within the framework of the preparation to shed light on the practices of the catechumenate that they illustrate. In this endeavour, Augustine and other late antique evidence on the broad organisation of the catechumenate during the period serve as points of reference to evaluate the evidence. However, I am attentive to variation and do not assume that standard practices were in place. This would lead me to erase differences in order to bring the information found in these texts in harmony with other late antique evidence. On the contrary, the study of these sermons enriches our understanding of the catechumenate during the period by highlighting variety and inventiveness as much as commonalities. Leaving aside a detailed analysis of the broad content, catechesis and exegesis in the sermons, that has been well studied by De Simone, Nazzaro and particularly Vopřada—who most recently published the first thorough study of the theological and mystagogical content of these catecheses—I concentrate on the catechumenate and explore these sermons as single witnesses to the rites and teaching for candidates, each of them offering a partial and peculiar view.<sup>26</sup>

24 Franes, D., (1920), *Die Werke des hl. Quodvultdeus, Bischofs von Karthago: gestorben um 453* (Munich), 60–63; Roetzer (1930), 150–154; Dondeyne (1932), 16–17; Quasten (1956), 101–108; Finn, Th., *ACW* 60 (2004); Johnson (2007), 186–187; Ferguson (2009), 771–775; Harmless (2014), 310–313.

25 Wiegand (1899), 54–60; Saxer (1988), 401–416; Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 470–472; Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 543; Vopřada (2020). I have not been able to see Silva, J.C. da, (1987), *A preparação ao batismo em Quodvultdeus* (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Diss. Lic.).

26 Vopřada (2020), 133–302. See as well: Simone, R. de, (1985), 'The Baptismal and Christological Catechesis of Quodvultdeus', *Augustinianum* 25, 265–282; Nazzaro, A.V., (2001), 'Quodvultdeus: un vescovo dell'Africa vandalica a Napoli' in Rotili, M., (ed.), (2001), *Società multiculturali nei secoli V–IX: scontri, convivenza, integrazione nel Mediterraneo occidentale: atti delle 7e giornate di studio sull'età romanobarbarica: Benevento, 31 maggio–2 giugno 1999* (Napoli) 33–51, esp. 38–49, reproduced with few updates in Nazzaro, A., (2009), 'La produzione omiletica di Quodvultdeus, vescovo di Cartagine', in Frenguelli,

## 2.1 *The Attribution to Quodvultdeus*

Among the thirteen sermons currently attributed to Quodvultdeus, ten were published under the name of Augustine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with doubts being raised about their authenticity.<sup>27</sup>

*\*De cantico novo (= Cant)*

*\*De cataclysmo (= Cata)*

*\*De ultima quarta feria (= Fer)*

*\*De Symbolo 1–2–3 (= Sy 1–2–3)*

*\*De tempore barbarico I (= Bar 1)*

*De quattuor virtutibus caritatis (= Virt)*

*Contra Iudaeos, paganos et arianos (= Iud)*

*Adversus quinque haereses (= Hae)*<sup>28</sup>

G., and Micaelli, C., (eds.), (2009), *Le forme e i luoghi della predicazione*, Atti del Seminario internazionale di studi (Macerata 21–23 novembre 2006) (Macerata) 27–67, esp. 31–54, reproduced with few updates in Nazzaro, A.V., (2014), 'Contro Giudei, pagani ed eretici. Reazione religiosa e politica all'invasione dei Vandali ariani di Quodvultdeus vescovo di Cartagine (v sec)', in Marin, M., Catarinella, F.M., (eds.), (2014), *Forme della polemica nell'omiletica latina di IV–VI secolo. Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Foggia, 11–13 settembre 2013* (Bari), 513–552, esp. 518–538; Vopřada, D., (2017c), 'Quodvultdeus' Sermons on the Creed: a Reassessment of his Polemics against the Jews, Pagans, and Arians', *Vox Patrum* 37, 335–369; Id., (2017b), 'Quodvultdeovy předkřestní katecheze a formování křesťanské identity [Quodvultdeus's Prebaptismal Catecheses and Forming of the Christian Identity]', *Studia Theologica* 19/2, 181–200. I have not seen Id., (2017a), 'Křestní a ekleziologická interpretace Velepísne u Quodvultdea z Kartága [The Baptismal and Ecclesiological Interpretation of the Song of Songs in Quodvultdeus of Carthage]', in Lichner, M., (2017), *Patristická a stredoveká recepcia Šalamúna. Kazatel'—Príslovia—Pieseň piesní* (Olomouc), 119–150. See also González Salinero, R., (1996), 'The Anti-Judaism of Quodvultdeus in the Vandal and Catholic Context of the vth century in North Africa', *REJ* 155, 447–459, esp. 452–458; Id., (2001), 'La invasión vándala en los "Sermones" de Quodvultdeus de Cartago', *Florentia Ili-berritana* 12, 221–237.

27 The abbreviations adopted here for these sermons are taken from Gryson (2007), II, 749–752 (except *Jud* which is rendered as *Iud*). Vopřada (2020) employs an alternative system: CN for *Cant*; C for *Cata*; UQF for *Fer*; S1–2–3 for *Sy* 1–2–3; CIPA for *Iud*; A1–2 for *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1–2 (= *Gr* 1–2); QVC for *Virt*; TB1 and TB2 for *Bar* 1 and *Bar* 2.

28 *Sy* 1–2–3, *Cant*, *Fer*, *Cata*, *Bar* 1 were first published in *Decima pars librorum divi Aurelii Augustini quorum non meminit in libris Retractationum*, Johannes Amerbach (Basel, 1506); *Hae* and *Iud* in *Undecima pars librorum divini Aurelii Augustini quorum mentionem non fecit in libris Retractationum*, Johannes Amerbach (Basel, 1506). For the later editions of Erasmus (1528–1529) and the theologians of Louvain (1577), see Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), LII–LIV (*Iud*), LXXVI–LXXVII (*Hae*), XCV–XCVI (the other sermons). See Franses (1920), 7–8 for an overview of early discussions of authenticity.

The Maurists, editors of Augustine's sermons in the late seventeenth century, more broadly questioned Augustine's authorship for all of these sermons in their complete edition of Augustine's works in the 1680s. They published the first seven sermons, here distinguished with an asterisk, as unauthentic in the sixth tome of their edition in 1685,<sup>29</sup> while *Virt* was published in the appendix—for unauthentic texts—to the fifth tome containing Augustine's sermons,<sup>30</sup> and similarly *Hae* and *Iud* were published in the appendix to the eighth tome.<sup>31</sup> The Maurists suggested that *Virt* was perhaps the work of a disciple of Augustine, as well as *Sy* 1–2–3, *Cata*, *Fer* and *Bar* 1, which could be from the same author; then they noted similarities with the preceding sermons for *Hae* and *Iud*, which they situated in the Vandal period.<sup>32</sup> A few years later, Le Nain de Tillemont extended these hypotheses, discussing for the first time nine of these sermons together—*Cant*, *Cata*, *Fer*, *Sy* 1–2–3, *Bar* 1, *Iud*, *Hae*; only *Virt* is not considered—and suggested that they were all from the period of the Vandal conquest or later, noting in a subsequent study that some were perhaps preached by the bishops Capreolus or Quodvultdeus of Carthage or their priests.<sup>33</sup> Almost two centuries later, Morin was then the first to attribute to the same author a larger set of twelve sermons, including the former nine and adding *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1–2 (= *Gr* 1–2) and *De tempore barbarico* 11 (= *Bar* 2) that were first published in 1852 by Mai under the name of Augustine.<sup>34</sup> Around twenty years later, Morin suggested that the author

29 Maurists, (1685), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi operum*, t. 6 (Paris), 555–568 (*Sy* 1), 568–575 (*Sy* 2), 575–582 (*Sy* 3), 590–598 (*Cant*), 597–602 (*Fer*), 602–608 (*Cata*), 608–614 (*Bar* 1), reprinted in *PL* 40 (1845), 637–668 (*Sy* 1–2–3) and 677–708 (*Cant*, *Fer*, *Cata*, *Bar* 1).

30 'Appendix tomi quinti operum S. Augustini', in Maurists, (1683), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi operum*, t. 5 (Paris), n. 106, 190–195 reprinted in *PL* 39 (1841), 1952–1957.

31 'Appendix tomi octavi operum s. Augustini', in Maurists, (1688), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi operum*, t. 8 (Paris), 2–12 (*Hae*) and 11–20 (*Iud*), reprinted in *PL* 42 (1841), 1101–1116 (*Hae*) and 1117–1130 (*Iud*).

32 'Appendix tomi quinti operum S. Augustini', in Maurists, (1683), 190; Maurists (1685), 545 (also highlighting borrowings from Augustine, *Util. Ieiun.* 3 in *Cant* IV and from *Io. eu. tr.* 80, 3 in *Cata* 111, on which see notes 69 and 75); 'Appendix tomi octavi operum S. Augustini', in Maurists, (1688), 2 and 11 (noting borrowings from Augustine, *Cons. eu.* 11.17 in *Iud* XVIII and from *Ciu.* XVIII, 23 in *Iud* XVII, on which see note 148; furthermore, contacts are suggested between *Iud* 1.1 and *Iud* XVII respectively with Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* 33 and 10).

33 Le Nain de Tillemont (1710), 934–938 and later Le Nain de Tillemont (1712), *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*, volume 16 (1712), 502.

34 Morin, G., (1896), 'Notes d'ancienne littérature ecclésiastique', *RBen* 13, 337–347, at 342. Mai, A., (1852), *Nova patrum bibliotheca*, t. 1 (Rome), 251–264 (n. 119); 264–274 (n. 120),

was the bishop Quodvultdeus of Carthage,<sup>35</sup> who may also have written the *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei*.<sup>36</sup> The attribution has been generally accepted since, particularly after Braun's critical editions of the *Liber* and the sermons, adding *Virt* to the set.<sup>37</sup> However, as will be shown here, this attribution is far from straightforward.

It is ascertained, thanks to internal evidence, that the *Liber* has to be attributed to a cleric of Carthage at the time of the Vandal conquest, later exiled in Italy.<sup>38</sup> It is more difficult to prove, however, that this cleric was the bishop

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274–282 (n. 121), following the order *Gr* 1–2, *Bar* 2 found in the single manuscript used, Vatican City, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Vat. lat. 450, f. 194<sup>v</sup>–202<sup>r</sup> (s. XIV), digitised at [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.450](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.450) (last consulted 16/1/2020). See also Morin, G., (1917), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini tractatus sive sermones inediti ex codice Guelferbyitano 4096* (Kempten-Munich), 200–218 (new edition of *Bar* 2).

35 On whom see 'Quodvultdeus 5', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 947–949.

36 Morin (1914–1919), 'Pour une future édition des opuscles de S. Quodvultdeus évêque de Carthage au v<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RBen* 31, 156–162. Morin also provisionally attributed seven other sermons to Quodvultdeus that have been left out since. His early hypothesis was discussed by Wiegand (1899), 53 for whom the sermons to candidates discussed in this study (except *Gr* 1 and 2, not mentioned) are of a same author, to be situated between ca. 450 and 530. Caspari (1869), 152 n. 120 suggested the first half of the sixth century for *Sy* 1–2–3 and *Iud*. Braun, R., *SC* 101–102 (1964); Braun, R., *CCSL* 60 (1976), vii and the survey in Braun, R., (1986), 'Quodvultdeus', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique* 12, 2882–2889. See sometimes detailed discussions accepting the attribution in: Schepens, P., (1919), 'Un traité à restituer à saint Quodvultdeus, évêque de Carthage au v<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RecSR* 9, 230–243; Schepens, P., (1923), 'Les œuvres de saint Quodvultdeus', *RecSR* 13, 76–78; Franeses (1920); Kalkman, R.G., (1963), *Two Sermons 'De tempore barbarico' Attributed to St. Quodvultdeus, Bishop of Carthage. A Study of Text and Attribution with Translation and Commentary* (Catholic University of America, Washington DC), 29–48; Courcelle, P., (1965), 'Quodvultdeus redivivus', *REA* 67, 165–170. More recently, scholars who accept the attribution are for instance: Finn, Th., (1997b), 'Quodvultdeus: The Preacher and the Audience. The Homilies on the Creed', *SP* 31, 42–58 almost reprinted as the introduction of *ACW* 60 (2004), 1–21; González Salinero (2001), 222–225 (summarising doubts but in fact accepting it); Nazzaro (2001), 38, reproduced in Nazzaro (2009), 30–31 and Nazzaro (2014), 518–520; Ferguson (2009), 771–775; Mbonigaba, F., (2015), *La traditio symboli nell'Africa cristiana all'epoca dell'invasione dei vandali: introduzione, testo latino e traduzione italiana del Contra Iudaeos, Paganos et Arrianos di Quodvultdeus di Cartagine* (Rome), 47–51; Vopřada (2017a; 2017b; 2017c); Vopřada (2020), 67–91. Delmulle, J., (2018a), 'Un fantôme et un pseudonyme (?). "Catellus", Iohannes Diaconus et l'auteur du *Liber promissionum et praedictionum Dei*', *RBen* 128/1, 5–30, at 21 n. 56 notes that the theme of the *Domini canes*, which seems to first appear in the *Liber promissionum*, is also found in *Sy* 3. For Delmulle, this would reinforce the attribution to the author of the *Liber*.

38 The attribution has been particularly demonstrated by Braun, *SC* 101 (1964), 88–113 with reference to earlier studies by Franeses and Schepens. See good summaries in Van Slyke, D., (2003), *Quodvultdeus of Carthage: the Apocalyptic Theology of a Roman African in Exile*

Quodvultdeus of Carthage and even less that he was the same individual writing letters to Augustine in the late 420s as a deacon, particularly since Quodvultdeus was a common name and because there is no evidence in late antique sources about any literary production of Quodvultdeus of Carthage.<sup>39</sup> The attribution of all the sermons to the same author, who would also have written the *Liber* is even more uncertain. Despite Franes' arguments for this common authorship, a few critics, particularly Kappelmacher and Simonetti, have raised sensible objections and expressed doubts about the unity of the set of sermons and their attribution—Simonetti even distinguished four different authors on the basis of a detailed linguistic study.<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that Braun's discussion of the sermons, which followed these critiques, mainly consisted in refuting them rather than providing positive evidence.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the attribution is based on two assumptions reinforcing each other: the sermons were all preached by a same author who also wrote the *Liber* and this author was necessarily the bishop of Carthage at the time of the Vandal conquest (439), particularly because of references in some of the sermons to Barbarians, a conquered city, and games.<sup>42</sup> As well underlined by Kappelmacher and Simon-

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(Strathfield NSW), 21–48 and Vopřada (2020), 67–70; additional discussion, with bibliography, in Delmulle (2018a), 19–29.

- 39 As underlined by Simonetti (1986), 35. In *PCBE* 1 (1982), 945–955 there are twenty-five individuals named Quodvultdeus. This is a significant number: for instance in comparison there are only five clerics named “Firmus”, although it was a very common name.
- 40 See Vaccari, A., (1921), Review of Franes (1920), *Biblica* 2, 101–102; Kappelmacher, A., (1931), ‘Echte und unechte Predigten Augustins’, *WS* 49, 89–102; Courtois, Ch., (1954), *Victor de Vita et son œuvre* (Algiers), 60 n. 305; Nock, A.D., (1949), ‘Two Notes’, *VChr* 3/1, 48–56, esp. 49–55 (listing scholars doubting the attribution and adding further scepticism); Simonetti, M., (1950), ‘Studi sulla letteratura cristiana d’Africa in età vandolica’, *RIL* 83, 407–424; Simonetti, M., (1978), ‘Qualche riflessione su Quodvultdeus di Cartagine’, *RSLR* 14, 201–207; Simonetti, M., (1986), *La produzione letteraria latina fra romani e barbari (sec. V–VIII)* (Rome), 35–36. See summaries of the debate with more bibliography in Van Slyke (2003), 48–63; Vopřada (2020), 70–76.
- 41 Braun, *SC* 101 (1964), 88–106, notably rejecting Simonetti’s detailed linguistic study and rightly noting that it was conducted before any critical edition was produced. However, Simonetti (1978b) produces other arguments based on agreements and differences in the polemical tools used in the sermons; he suggest a common authorship for *Iud* and *Sy* 3, while distinguishing *Cata* and *Gr* 1–2 from *Sy* 1–2–3.
- 42 *Bar* 2, v would refer to a conquered city identified with Carthage in 439 and serves to date and situate the other sermons before it; the preacher would be Quodvultdeus because he is mentioned by Victor of Vita (*Historia persecutionis* 1, 15) as the bishop of Carthage, expelled amongst other clerics after the conquest. See Franes (1920), 11–18. Kappelmacher (1931), 96–98 suggests that this sermon and *Gr* 1 and 2 were preached by Augustine in a besieged Hippo: these contrasting views show the weakness of the hypotheses listed in note 52.



etti, the attribution of the sermons to a single author rests on arguments developed since Morin and his followers, which mostly focused on common linguistic features and evidence of a culture shared by the bishop of Carthage during the Vandal conquest, the author of the *Liber* and the deacon Quodvultdeus writing to Augustine, such as similar phrases or sentence constructions, mentions of similar rites, the use of the same biblical text, an interest in heresies and synthetic summaries on Christianity, a shared devotion for the martyrs Cyprian and Perpetua and Felicitas, references to the fact that the preacher studied the Scriptures since childhood and a taste for modesty.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that such arguments are not decisive but only demonstrate that all this evidence originates from a common environment: late antique Africa. Simonetti notes that many of these features are found as well in sermons attributed to Augustine, which may have served as models for the genre.<sup>44</sup> The assumption about the author may also be questioned: on the one hand, since priests were granted the right to preach in Augustine's time and could be in charge of the teaching of catechumens together with deacons, there is no compelling reason to suggest that all sermons were preached by a bishop—although this remains a likely hypothesis.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, details in each sermon about the historical context cannot be harmonised to suggest a single and precise setting and dating—Carthage, between Quodvultdeus' election and 439—knowing that the common authorship is not proved.<sup>46</sup> Even if we assume that only bishops preached about the central rites of the baptismal preparation, this does not mean that all sermons were preached by the same bishop and that all were preached in Carthage.<sup>47</sup>

A weak point of the argument in favour of the attribution to Quodvultdeus is the identification of the author of all the sermons with the author of the *Liber*,

43 For example Morin (1914–1919); Franes (1920), 18–37; Braun, *SC* 101 (1964), 107–113.

44 Simonetti (1978b), 202.

45 Deogratias, deacon of Carthage was in charge of teaching catechumens, see Augustine, *Cat. rud.* Finn, *ACW* 60 (2004), 3 followed by Mbonigaba (2015), 68 n. 34 and 72–73, thinks that *Iud* was preached by Quodvultdeus as deacon in the early 430s because it mentions a *paterfamilias* handing over the creed—this may however refer to God, see the discussion in Vopřada (2020), 201–202.

46 Attempts have thus been made to suggest a precise chronology for each sermon, notably by Braun (1986), 2883–2884; Finn, *ACW* 60 (2004), 63; Vopřada (2020), 140, 170, 174–175, 185–186, 200–201, 212–213, 216–217.

47 Vopřada (2020), 75–76 objects to the argument, already formulated in my doctoral thesis, that priests could also preach to candidates, while it is more likely that bishops were in charge of the central rites. However true this is, it does not provide an argument for the attribution of all sermons to Quodvultdeus.

for which there is no clear support in the evidence beyond parallels in style and content.<sup>48</sup> In fact, internal evidence in the *Liber* seems to go against the identification of a single author for both the *Liber* and at least two of the sermons. In the *Liber*, Quodvultdeus refers to a peculiar explanation by Augustine of 2 Samuel 6, 16–23, interpreted as a figure of Christ's Passion and crucifixion.<sup>49</sup> As shown by La Bonnardière, Augustine rarely explained or quoted passages from Samuel—which was for him the second of the four “Books of Kings”, following the ordering of the Septuagint and old Latin versions—and never discussed the episode narrated in 2 Samuel 6, 16–23 in his extant writings.<sup>50</sup> However, this passage of Samuel is precisely discussed and interpreted in the same way as described by the *Liber* in *Gr* 2.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that the sermon mentioned and attributed to Augustine in the *Liber* is *Gr* 2, in which case the author of the *Liber* cannot have preached *Gr* 1–2—*Gr* 2 being the continuation of *Gr* 1 by the same preacher. Franes, followed by Braun, have dismissed this evidence by arguing that *Gr* 2 borrowed from a lost sermon of Augustine, while Kappelmacher, followed by Simonetti, accepted the attribution to Augustine.<sup>52</sup> The only other possible explanation would be that Quodvultdeus, writing the *Liber*, put under the name of Augustine sermons that he preached himself, as this would explain his knowledge of *Gr* 2. However, this would mean that he deliberately falsified the authorship with no apparent motive. Knowing that authorship fluctuates in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, and particularly for sermons attributed to Augustine, none of these hypotheses is necessary: the attribution of *Gr* 1–2 to Augustine seems wrong—since Morin, most critics have rejected it—but apparently goes back to Augustine's close contemporaries, perhaps, but not necessarily, to Quodvultdeus. The most straightforward explanation, therefore, is that *Gr* 1–2 were the work of a late antique anonymous preacher to be distinguished from the author of the *Liber*.

Similarly, despite its claims, Braun's extensive and valuable work on the manuscript transmission of the sermons does not provide stronger ground for

48 Vopřada (2020), 74, while accepting the attribution, rightly emphasises this weakness.

49 Quodvultdeus, *Liber* II, xxv.54: “De quibus misteriis qui etiam illud nosse desiderat quomodo sit David saltans ante arcam nudatus coram servis et ancillis suis, ut christum crucifixum praesentibus viris et feminis demonstraret, venerandae memoriae Augustini episcopi dicta inspiciat quibus latius in his pervagatus paene omnia comprehendit” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 123); the same interpretation is also mentioned in *Liber*, *Gloria sanctorum* 13, 16.

50 La Bonnardière (1960), 57–58 and 74–75; this is also shown thanks to a search in the online *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* (<https://cag3.net>).

51 *Gr* 2, v–vii.

52 Franes (1920), 45–47; Braun (1964), 100–101; Kappelmacher (1931), 96; Simonetti (1950), 415 and 421.

the attribution of all sermons to Quodvultdeus.<sup>53</sup> The sermons are all transmitted under the name of Augustine and generally circulated with authentic texts of Augustine and pseudo-Augustinian material.<sup>54</sup> Among these, the three sermons *De symbolo* (Sy 1–2–3) are commonly transmitted in a set of four sermons all attributed to Augustine, the first one being distinguished since the seventeenth century as the only truly belonging to Augustine (*De symbolo ad catechumenos*). The fact that eight of the sermons now attributed to Quodvultdeus are found together in manuscripts does not constitute any proof for the attribution of the whole set to a single author.<sup>55</sup> It only shows, supplementing the internal evidence about a common environment of composition, that these sermons were associated in manuscripts since the Early Middle Ages, either because they circulated within a late antique African collection of sermons or because they were brought together at a later date in an effort to compile texts of Augustine on faith, baptism and initiation against heretics, particularly Arians.<sup>56</sup>

Except for Augustine's case—for which the *Indiculus* and the substantial *corpus* of his writings provides extensive evidence to draw parallels with texts of uncertain attribution in extant manuscripts<sup>57</sup>—the very idea of providing an authorship and a strict geographical localisation for a number of pseudonymous sermons on initiation from late antique Africa that do not contain unambiguous evidence and are not all transmitted together as part of a clearly identifiable late antique collection is problematic because of the lack of proofs connecting the sermons to one another and pointing to their composition by a single individual.<sup>58</sup> In this study, therefore, the sermons are not considered as the work of Quodvultdeus and it is not assumed that they were all preached by the same individual in the same city. At the same time, scholarship on the sermons has well demonstrated that all originate from late antique Africa. The

53 Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), V–VII and XL–CVI. See as well Franes (1920), 1–9; Kalkman (1963), 10–28.

54 See *CPPM* 1103–1109, 1204, 1205, 1728, 1729, 1730.

55 These are Sy 1–2–3, *Virt, Cant, Fer, Cata, Bar* 1, see Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), LXXXII–CIII. The weakness of the any argument based on the manuscript transmission of these sermons is also noted by Whelan (2018), 52.

56 Laon, *Bibliothèque municipale*, 136 (s. IX) is a good example as the earliest witness of a collection containing seven of the nine sermons discussed by Le Nain de Tillemont (excluding *Iud* and *Hae*) starting with Augustine, *Symb. cat.* and followed by other African pseudonymous works against Arians.

57 Possidius' *Indiculus* is however incomplete; this is evident for his preaching on the creed, as *Indiculus* x<sup>6</sup>, 175 only lists three sermons on the creed compared to the six today attributed to Augustine (S. 212, S. 213, S. 214, S. 214A (= Dolbeau 1), S. 215; *Symb. cat.*).

58 This was noted by Kappelmacher (1931), 101.

effort to attribute them to Quodvultdeus has also brought welcome attention to the sermons, which are all available in Braun's critical edition. They thus provide exceptional material to explore the initiation of catechumens in Africa between the beginning of the fifth century and the Vandal period into the sixth century, perhaps in Carthage and the surrounding region. Reading these sermons without assuming that they are the work of a single author gives a fresh perspective, stressing diversity and adaptations in the catechesis and rites performed.

## 2.2 *The Baptismal Preparation: Transforming the Self, Renouncing the Devil and Believing in God*

### 2.2.1 Presentation of the Sermons

The examination was performed on you in the following way: from concealment you were each presented before the entire church, where, with your head—once erect in pride and malice—bowed, you were standing barefoot on goatskins [...] He has probed, he has examined, he has touched the hearts of his servants with fear of him; by his power he has caused the Devil to flee, and he has freed his servants from the Devil's dominion. [...] And so the purified family of the redeemer, after it had chanted the song of salvation, received the creed as a remedy against the venom of the serpent. [...] If our help is in his name, let us renounce the Devil, his pomp and his angels. You have heard this and you have also professed aloud that you renounce the Devil, his pomp, and his angels.<sup>59</sup>

This important ritual session, here described in Sy 1, was the climax of the preparation for baptism. Amongst a number of rites, it prominently included a public renunciation of the Devil and a profession of faith, demonstrating their new commitment to the whole community. Six sermons were preached as explanations some time after the ritual session: Sy 1–2–3, *Iud*, *Gr* 1 and *Gr*

59 Sy 1, 1.5–11: "*Ut ex locis secretis singuli produceremini in conspectu totius ecclesiae, ibique cervice humiliata quae male fuerat antea exaltata, in humilitate pedum cilicio substrato in vobis celebraretur examen [...]. Probavit, examinavit, corda servorum suorum suo timore tetigit; diabolum sua virtute fugavit, atque ab eius dominio suam familiam liberavit. [...] Purgata itaque familia redemptoris, posteaquam cantavit canticum salutis, accepit symboli remedium contra serpentis venenum [...]. Si adiutorium nostrum in nomine est eius, renuntiemus diabolo, pompis et angelis eius. Hoc audistis, hoc et vos professi estis, renuntiare vos diabolo, pompis et angelis eius*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 305–306; Finn, *ACW* 60 (2004), 23–24).

2.<sup>60</sup> It is noteworthy that there is no parallel description of this rite in any of Augustine's sermons: the closest parallels are Sermons 215 and 216. As seen in Chapter 4, the first was preached after the creed was recited and allusively refers to a renunciation of the Devil, while the latter does not contain any reference to the creed and should probably be situated at the beginning of Lent as a sermon following the admission of *competentes* to prepare for baptism. While all the six above-mentioned sermons closely connect the renunciation to the creed, in Augustine, only Sermon 215 does it, but without further details. Moreover, Sermon 215 sharply differs in style and concern when compared to the sermons here considered. In particular, it does not include any polemical discussion: as most other sermons of Augustine on the creed, it puts most emphasis on explaining the text of the creed and encouraging its memorisation by candidates.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, the sermons here considered all dwell extensively on heresiological discourse, while only Sy 2 refers to memorisation.

The six sermons are all long and detailed: Sy 2–3 reach around 4500 words each, while *Gr* 1 and its continuation *Gr* 2 come together at more than 8000 words, which is about the length of Sy 1, while *Iud* is just above 7000 words. This is generally much more than Augustine's sermons on the creed: the only comparable sermon of Augustine is *De symbolo ad catechumenos* which comes at about 3800 words, while the next longest is the model Sermon 214 (c. 2700 words) and the shortest is Sermon 212 (just under 1000 words). Augustine's Sermon 216 exhorting *competentes* after an exorcism session—often compared to Quodvultdeus' sermons—only covers about 2300 words. This may be due to different practices among preachers, Augustine being briefer than others; however, it may also be explained by the quality of the medieval transmission of Augustine's sermons, knowing that the longest one currently attributed to him, *De symbolo ad catechumenos*, is generally transmitted together with Sy 1–2–3.<sup>62</sup>

60 Saxer (1988), 403 wrongly situates *Gr* 1–2 before the renunciation. For detailed presentations of these sermons and their content see now Vopřada (2020), 168–174 (Sy 1), 174–180 (Sy 2), 181–186 (Sy 3), 186–200 (*Gr* 1–2), 200–209 (*Iud*).

61 Vopřada (2017c), 362–364 and Vopřada (2020), 300–301 downplay the peculiarity of the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus by pointing to references to heretics in other late antique explanations of the creed; however, it is clear that the emphasis in these sermons is particularly strong and a clear distinctive feature, particularly in comparison to Augustine's extant preaching to *competentes*.

62 In a recent study, Dolbeau, F., (2017), 'Longueur et transmission des sermons d'Augustin au peuple. Un examen des sermons pour l'Épiphanie et *De sanctis*', *RBen* 127/1, 5–27 suggests that one has to suspect cuts in Augustine's sermons on saints below 2000 words except for exceptional circumstances; in the special case of these initiation sermons, most are between 1000 and 2500 words long (except S. 214 and *Sym. Cat.*); seeing how much longer

In any case, these sermons offer an alternative and much more developed view on catecheses and ritual practices in fifth-century Africa that complements what is known for Augustine's community in Hippo.

Three other sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, not connected to this rite of renunciation and adhesion, are much shorter and less informative about the initiation process. However, they still provide rare references to the candidates and give a further idea of the catechesis imparted to them before baptism: *Fer* focuses on the Passion of Christ and was preached on Holy Wednesday—thus the day before the celebration of the Passion—as clear from the title preserved in the manuscript transmission, *Cata* is a remarkable example of baptismal catechesis preached shortly before baptism and providing a detailed explanation of the theological significance of the initiation rites.<sup>63</sup> Finally, *Cant*—which employs significant Augustinian material as we will see—refers to the rite of enrolment to prepare for baptism and exhorts candidates to a newly begun life. It cannot be clearly situated, but it may have been preached at the beginning of Lent, like Augustine's Sermon 216.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.2.2 Context of Composition

When detached from Quodvultdeus' authorship, the sermons can no longer be precisely dated in the 430s as has been attempted notably by Braun and Vopřada.<sup>65</sup> The sermons themselves contain little information on the historical context and may have been preached at different periods. There is no reference to Barbarians or to difficult times in *Cant* and Sy 2. Moreover, while Sy 2 and 3 particularly polemicise against Arians, *Cant* only refutes them as part of a triad of heretics with Manichaeans and Pelagians, being rejected

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the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus are, it seems possible that Augustine's sermons to *competentes* as currently preserved have been reduced in size in the course of the transmission (the transmission of Sermon 213, known both in a shorter and longer version, already shows this, see Chapter 4, note 154).

63 *Cata* 1.1: "Quoniam in proximo est dies redemptionis vestrae"; 111.1: "Ecce, dilectissimi, venturi estis ad fontem aquae" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 409–410). For more detailed presentations of *Fer* and *Cata* see respectively Vopřada (2020), 212–215 and 216–219.

64 This was already suggested by Audet (1954), 158 and is also the view of Vopřada (2017b), 184–185; Vopřada (2020), 137. For a detailed discussion of *Cant* see Vopřada (2020), 137–149. There are few hints in the sermons at the possible readings of the day that could help situating them. Only *Fer* 1.5 mentions Lk 14, 15–24 as the Gospel read that day. On the theme of *Cant* in Augustine and its roots in the Psalms see Rondet, H., (1964), 'Le thème du cantique nouveau dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin', in Alvernay, M.-Th. d', et al. (eds.), (1964), *L'homme devant Dieu: mélanges offerts au père Henri de Lubac* (Paris), 341–366.

65 See note 46.

with equal strength.<sup>66</sup> Thus, knowing that Augustine too polemicised against Arians, particularly towards the end of his life, these sermons may have been preached already during his late episcopate.<sup>67</sup> *Cant*, because of its mention of *Pelagiani*, cannot be placed before the Pelagian controversy gained prominence in Africa and should probably be dated after 416–417.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it contains substantial *verbatim* borrowings from Augustine's sermons, which makes one wonder about the precise context of composition—it is difficult to imagine the bishop of Carthage in the 430s preaching this sort of patchwork sermon, but perhaps rather other clerics.<sup>69</sup> The other sermons are strongly anti-Arian, while also rejecting other heretics, particularly Manichaeans and Pelagians for *Cata* and *Fer*.<sup>70</sup> However, they also refer to a context of war: *Cata* mentions Barbarians oppressing the congregation, as does *Iud*,<sup>71</sup> while *Gr* 2 starts with a reminder of the past sermon—*Gr* 1—and a long introductory exhortation to the audience asked to persevere in the midst of the evil of the world, with reference to a context of war, most probably hinting at the Vandal conquest.<sup>72</sup> The preacher of *Fer* situates his polemical discussion in Africa

66 *Cant* VI.1: "Ecce haereticus Manicheus"; VII.1: "Alii haeretici arriani"; VIII.1: "Alia quoque spelunca latronum non bonorum, haereticorum pelagianorum, et demonstranda est et cavenda" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 387–388 and 391).

67 Against Arians, see for instance Augustine, *Conl. Max.* and *C. Max.* dated after 427. For a recent overview on Arians both before and after Augustine: Whelan, R., (2016), 'Arianism in Africa', in Berndt, G.M., Steinacher, R., (eds.), (2016), *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed* (London), 239–255. More broadly on the stakes of the Arian controversy in Vandal Africa: Whelan, R., *Being Christian in Vandal Africa. The Politics of Orthodoxy in the Post-Imperial West* (Oakland, CA), esp. 29–54.

68 See *Cant* VIII.1 where *pelagiani* is employed. Starting from 416–417, Augustine named his opponent as Pelagius and started using the term *pelagianus*, first once in *Ep.* 4\*, 4 (c. 417) and then frequently in *Nupt. et conc.* and *An. et or.* written in 419–421 and *Ep.* 202A from 419. See Berrouard, M.-F., (1981), 'Les lettres 6\* et 19\* de St. Augustin. Leur date et les enseignements qu'elles apportent sur l'évolution de la crise pélagienne', *REAug* 27, 264–277, esp. 270–274.

69 *Cant* III.3–4 (from "iumento insideres" to "in Hierusalem") is copied and only slightly adapted from Augustine, *Util. ieiun.* 3 (as already noted by the Maurists—see note 32—and Partoens (2012), 159 and 184 apparatus); *Cant* IV.1–8 copies with very minor changes Augustine, *S.* 306B (= Denis 18), 1 (as noted by Vopřada (2020), 139 n. 34, see my note 161). These borrowings are not identified in Braun's critical edition. By borrowing Augustine's sermons, the preacher follows Augustine's advice for less skilled preachers, see Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* IV, 29.62.

70 *Cata* v.9; *Fer* VI.1–2.

71 *Cata* VI.17: "Iam nec barbaros timent" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 419).

72 *Iud* I.1: "Inter pressuras et angustias praesentis temporis et nostrae officia servitutis cogimur"; XXI, 5; *Gr* 2, I.3: "qui memores captivitatis vestrae patienter et fortiter toleratis mala quae in

and also recalls a sermon previously preached about how to handle difficult times, which may be *Gr* 2, in which case *Fer* would be the third sermon of the same preacher.<sup>73</sup> *Iud* borrows from the eighteenth book of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, thus it should have been preached after its diffusion in the 420s.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, *Cata* borrows from a homily of Augustine on John's Gospel, part of a series that was dictated starting from autumn 419 onwards and sent to the city of Carthage—which provides a plausible setting for this sermon.<sup>75</sup> In summary, these sermons are more likely to have been preached starting from the late 420s into the Vandal period.

### 2.2.3 The Rites of Renunciation and Adhesion

It is remarkable that although they do not necessarily all pertain to the same context and liturgical setting, all the sermons broadly share the same structure, starting with exhortations to preserve the benefits of the rites and the new life begun, then providing explanations and exegesis related to the liturgical setting of the day, and finally focusing on the Church, often refuting Arians and concluding on examples to foster unity and discipline within the congregation. This, I argue, results from the fact that they are part of the same genre, catechesis to baptismal candidates, and thus follow a set of conventions, among which, it seems, the recalling or anticipation of rituals and the refutation of religious opponents played a major role.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, within this shared framework, as I will show, they display evidence of remarkable creativity both in terms of the rites and the catechesis.

I here first focus on the main rites of renunciation and adhesion, which are best explored by analysing all the six sermons on the creed together to highlight

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*mundo patiamini*"; II.1: "*Credam melius posse vivere homines finito bello, cum talia geruntur in bello?*"; III.1: "*Quid est, stulte, quod te movet gaudium temporale malorum?*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 227 and 459–460); see also IV.2.

73 *Fer* VI.2: "*Et quare tanta mala patiamur, vel quibus meritis peccatorum in manus tribulationum nos traditi fuimus cum ante paucissimos dies loqueremur, simul agnovimus, simul flevimus*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 405). Le Nain de Tillemont (1710), 935 and others after him prefer to relate *Fer* to *Bar* 1.

74 See more later in this chapter.

75 Compare *Cata* III, 3: "*Tolle enim verbum, et quid est aqua, nisi aqua? Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 410–411) and Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 80, 3: "*Detrahe verbum, et quid est aqua nisi aqua? Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum, etiam ipsum tamquam visibile verbum*" (Willems, *CCSL* 36 (1954), 529). On Augustine's work starting in 419 see Augustine, *Ep.* 23A\*, 3 and for the dating of Augustine's series of homilies on John, Chapter 4 note 26.

76 On the rhetorical structure of *Iud* see Mbonigaba (2015), 92–103.



common features.<sup>77</sup> However, to emphasise the diverse and fragmentary nature of the evidence, instead of merging all sermons into a single presentation, I take Sy 1, the longest and most complete description, as a point of reference and comparison. I then compare all the nine sermons as sources for the catechesis provided to candidates, particularly analysing their references to the status and progress of candidates in the initiation, their use of initiation as a way to foster unity within the broader congregation, and their conclusive remarks on the Church, demonstrating the significance of the polemical context in the initiation process.

In Sy 1 the preacher begins by stating that his catechesis is intended as an explanation both on the rites (*sacramenta*) of the preceding night and on the creed (*symbolum*).<sup>78</sup> For the preacher, candidates need the sermon as fitting food (*competens cibum*) through which God gives the increase—perhaps an allusion to their status as *competentes* and the common African interpretation of 1 Cor 3, 6 in link to the catechumenate.<sup>79</sup> Sy 1 then contains the unique and detailed description of the initiation process quoted above: candidates, who were at first gathered in a separate place (*ex locis secretis*), come that night—and not on other nights (*praeteritis noctibus actum non est*)—each at a time (*singuli*) in front of the whole community (*in conspectu totius ecclesiae*), bow their neck, put their feet on goatskin, undergo an examination (*examen*), are freed from the Devil and hear the name of Christ invoked upon them.<sup>80</sup> During this humbling rite, they all chant Ps 138, 3: “Probe me, Lord, and know my heart”. The preacher explains that this dramatic rite, identical for everyone no matter their social status, is meant to test candidates, expel the Devil and induce fear of God. After the chanting, the ritual session includes a renunciation of the Devil in three parts, renouncing “the Devil, his pomps and his angels”.<sup>81</sup> It is followed by the reception of the creed, a *sacramentum* and new weapon against

77 Vopřada (2020), 152–168 provides another recent description of these rites, generally agreeing with the hypotheses about diversity in practice between Quodvultdeus and Augustine and within the six sermons, which I formulated already in my doctoral thesis.

78 Sy 1, 1.1: “*Sacramentorum rationem, sive transactae noctis, sive praesentis sancti symboli exponendam atque explanandam suscepimus sanctitati vestrae*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 305).

79 Sy 1, 1.2.

80 This somehow parallels a passing remark about pre-baptismal catechesis in the African sixth-century author Verecundus of Iunca, *Commentarii super cantica ecclesiastica*, In canticum Habacuc 8: “*Cum enim singuli catechizandi offeruntur, singuli equi sunt. Ubi vero purificandi deponuntur in fonte, iam quadrigae ligantur*” (Demeulenaere, CCL 93 (1976), 133). Thus candidates are first singled out and then initiated as a group.

81 Sy 1, 1.4–11.

the Devil together with the banner of the cross (*crucis vexillo*) that bring the victory to Christians.<sup>82</sup> Candidates are soldiers of Christ, new recruits (*tirones Dei*) ready to fight with the weapon of the *sacramenta*—this terminology recalls Augustine's Sermon 216.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the creed received is a new step in their membership complementary to the cross that was until then their main marker of Christian belonging.

Sy 2 and 3 contain short allusions to the ritual actions performed, mostly corresponding to Sy 1, again using very similar language to refer to the rituals. Sy 3 lists exorcisms, prayers, chants, insufflations (*insufflationes*), goatskins, bowing necks and bare feet, actions which for him are *sacramenta* and food in the womb.<sup>84</sup> Van Slyke has suggested that the *insufflationes* may not be exorcising actions but the breathing to bless or bestow the Spirit in the phase of adhesion following the renunciation of the Devil.<sup>85</sup> The preacher states that the Devil has been expelled from the candidates when they renounced him and relates these actions to the reception of the creed which he is about to explain.<sup>86</sup> Sy 2 is much less informative about the rite but similarly connects the recitation of the creed to the renunciation of the Devil.<sup>87</sup> *Iud* and *Gr* 1 also provide brief descriptions of the rites that bear strong commonalities to Sy 1. In *Iud*, there are references to the great *sacramentum* that was celebrated on the night before (*transactae noctis*), the expulsion of the Devil and the introduction of Christ in each candidate as they put Christ's yoke—in connection to Mt 11, 29–30—and the addition that they shall now receive an explanation of the creed that

82 Sy 1, I. 9. The repeated use of *sacramentum* for the creed in these sermons further shows, as it has already been suggested for the canon of the council of Hippo and for Augustine in general, that the term often points to rites of initiation.

83 Sy 1, I.12–13: "*Optimi iam tirones Dei, fortes milites Christi dum arma sacramentorum suscipitis*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 306); Augustine S. 216, 2 (*contirones*).

84 Sy 3, I.3: "*Omnia sacramenta quae acta sunt et aguntur in vobis per ministerium servorum Dei, exorcismis, orationibus, canticis spiritalibus, insufflationibus, cilicio, inclinatione cervicium, humilitate pedum, —pavor ipse omni securitate appetendus—, haec omnia, ut dixi, escae sunt, quae vos reficiunt in utero, ut renatos ex baptismo hilares vos mater exhibeat Christo*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 349).

85 On the often drawn distinction between *exsufflare* (breathe to expel the Devil) and *insufflare* (breathe to bestow the Spirit) see Van Slyke, D., (2007), 'Breathing Blessing, Bestowing the Spirit: "Insufflatio" as a Distinct Ritual Gesture in Ancient Christian Initiation', *EphLit* 121, 301–327 followed with some nuances by Vopřada (2020), 157–159. For Van Slyke the distinction was common in the fourth and fifth centuries particularly in Africa but blurred in the Early Middle Ages.

86 Sy 3, I.4–7.

87 Sy 2, I. 1–4.

they have recently received.<sup>88</sup> In *Gr* 1, the preacher also points to a rite that has happened during the past night (*transactae noctis*), when candidates received a remedy (*medicina*), which is a reference to the creed.<sup>89</sup> “Those who come to grace (*qui ad gratiam acceditis*)” received the words of the Father as an antidote against the venom of the snake of the Devil, submitted their necks to a light yoke—again *Mt* 11, 29–30—and were assembled in public (*ad publicum*), where they renounced the Devil and received Christ.<sup>90</sup> Finally, *Iud*, *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 2, as *Sy* 1, all seem to refer to the same phrase of renunciation of the Devil structured in three parts, renouncing “the Devil, his pomps and his angels”, most probably corresponding to the liturgical formula that was used, attested as well in Tertullian and Augustine—while it is uncertain whether it was performed in a declarative or interrogatory form.<sup>91</sup> *Iud*, *Gr* 1, *Sy* 2 and 3 thus seems all to comment on the same main rite as *Sy* 1.

However, each sermon contains peculiar details not found in *Sy* 1, but sometimes shared between them. The preacher of *Iud* closely relates the reception of the creed—that has already happened—to his sermon and notes that he is preaching on a special day with a crowded assembly (*tantae congregationis*): playing with the imagery of light and darkness, he situates the sermon after a night of vigil, during which candidates prayed and chanted psalms.<sup>92</sup> These details seem to partially correspond to *Gr* 1 in which the preacher states that his sermon is required because it is a day of special solemnity (*sollemnitas congregationis*) and provides a striking description of the process compared and contrasted to contemporary schools: “You have seen how this teacher (*magister*) has prepared the classroom (*auditorium*) [...] and he made you stay in the

88 *Iud* 1, 5–11: “*Exigit enim a nobis ratio huius tantae congregationis, et noctis transactae vobis reddere rationem, et istius diei de tanto sacramento percepto veram sempiternamque demonstrare salutem [...]. Sed vigilando, orando, psallendo, contra adversarium diabolum dimicando, et magnam lucem infusam cordibus nostris sensimus, et in nocte opera diei peregrimus. Quid enim egimus in hac nocte? Diabolum fugavimus et Christum introduximus. [...] Videtis, dilectissimi, quae bona habeatis praeparata, et ex quo onere vel ex quibus sarcinis peccatorum relevamini ab isto qui vos vocat ut suscipiatis iugum eius lenem et sarcinam eius levem [...]. Quid sit hoc, ex verbis symboli quod modo accepistis, vobis expositum esse cognoscite*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 227–228).

89 *Gr* 1, I.10.

90 *Gr* 1, II.1–3.

91 *Iud* 1.11: “*renuntiare diabolo, pompis et angelis eius*”; II.18: “*Renuntiet diabolo, pompis et angelis eius*”; *Gr* 1, III.1–2 and particularly IV.13: “*renuntiare pompis diaboli, et angelis eius*”; *Sy* 2, 1.3: “*renuntiet diabolo, pompis et angelis eius*” (Braun, R., (ed.), CCL 60 (1976), 228, 230, 335, 442–444), also discussed in Vopřada (2020), 160–162; Augustine, S. 215, 1; for Tertullian see Introduction note 7. On the renunciation, with bibliography, see Chapter 4, note 159.

92 See note 88.

morning in front of him (cf. Ps 5, 4–5), listen and say what should be renounced (*renuntiandum*), and in whom to believe (*credendum*).<sup>93</sup> The preacher seems to situate the rites in the morning and the reference to candidates who are there to “listen and say” might seem in contradiction with the earlier statement in *Gr* 1 that the rites happened on the preceding night. A way to solve this would be to assume that *Gr* 1 implies the same practice as *Iud*: the rites started at night as a vigil and finished in the morning with the renunciation and the creed, followed by the sermon preached after dawn.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, *Sy* 2 and 3 do not refer to the time when the rite was performed. *Sy* 3 only states that the ritual actions “were and are made (*acta sunt et aguntur*)”, thus not clearly situating nor confining them to a single session.<sup>95</sup> *Sy* 3, however, provides an explanation to why the sermon is closely connected to the rites but only preached after they were performed: for the preacher, the ritual cleansing of the candidates’ hearts is a necessary condition to hear an explanation.<sup>96</sup> This cleansing is the ritual examination, exorcism and renunciation of the Devil, which according to both *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 3 took the form of questions and answers, candidates replying “I renounce”, probably to three questions: “Do you renounce the Devil?”, “his pomps?” and “his angels?”.<sup>97</sup> *Gr* 1 insists on the fact that all candidates replied together (*una voce*) using the first person singular rather than the plural to highlight the unity of the group since the time when they had enrolled for baptismal preparation (*qui nomina vestra conscribenda dedistis*): they become one single individual (*ex multis una persona*), representing the united Church.<sup>98</sup> *Sy* 3 extends this to the creed, noting that candidates have themselves pronounced “I believe (*credo*)”: this is a clear allusion to the fact that the creed was recited, either in full declaratory form by the candidates or in interrogatory form, candidates simply replying “*credo*” to each proposition.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, Augustine’s Sermon 215 clearly states that each candidate recited the creed on its own (“*sin-*

93 *Gr* 1, I–II, esp. II.3: “*Vidistis quemadmodum vobis hic magister ordinaverit hoc auditorium [...], fecitque vos mane adstare in conspectu suo, audire et dicere cui renuntiandum sit, et cui credendum*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 442; own translation).

94 Saxer (1988), 406 seems not to have seen this difficulty and simply stated that the preacher spoke in the morning.

95 *Sy* 3, I.3.

96 *Sy* 3, I.7–8: “*Parata sunt corda vestra, quia exclusus est inimicus de cordibus vestris. Mundata est domus, non remaneat inanis*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 349).

97 As noted by Saxer (1988), 408–410.

98 *Gr* 1, II.4.

99 *Sy* 3, I.4: “*Sic accepistis, sic vos credere dixistis: credo*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 354). There is a similar hint in *Haer* VI.7 where interrogations are quoted in full, as noted by Westra (2002), 169 n. 239.

*guli reddidistis*").<sup>100</sup> Perhaps in connection with this first recitation, Sy 2 starts with a reference to memorisation recalling Augustine's sermons: "You have come to know that the mystery (*sacramentum*) of the creed, which, as required, you have fixed in your memory (*retinetis*) as your salvation commanded, is the foundation of the Catholic faith".<sup>101</sup>

In summary, it can only be inferred that all the sermons followed exactly the same liturgical practice. It is possible but uncertain that they followed a rite celebrated only once (Sy 1) that was part of a vigil with chants and prayers (*Iud*), the sermon being preached on the following morning (*Gr* 1). However, silences and differences in sermons leave open the possibility that they were not all preached for the same occasion, and that there were diverging ways of organising the preparation in Africa, some communities preferring a unique rite, while others repeated it. Quasten noted a parallel with Theodore of Mopsuestia, who also refers to a rite of exorcisms on goat-skins that was repeated at the beginning of Lent and on Easter Vigil, and argued that Quodvultdeus' community, because of the reference to a single rite not performed on previous nights in Sy 1, only celebrated it once just before baptism.<sup>102</sup> However, sermons are not liturgical books: they only refer to the immediate liturgical setting, here the preceding nights of preparation and there is no reason to imply that other similar exorcisms could not have been organised weeks earlier. The parallel from Antioch, as well as our interpretation of Augustine's Sermon 216—situating a session of exorcism at the beginning of Lent—cannot be strictly used to interpret these African sermons and date the rituals, but still suggest that the repetition of such rites was possible.

The sermons only show with certainty that they were all preached in communities where an important rite of renunciation and adhesion took place sometime before it was explained in a sermon, and perhaps repeated as suggested in Sy 3. *Gr* 1, Sy 2 and 3 imply that candidates received and recited the creed—or replied to interrogations on it—some time before the sermon was given, having started the process of memorisation according to Sy 2.

Despite widespread consensus in scholarship, there is no evidence in any of the sermons about their respective dating during the Lenten period. It can only be said that they were all preached before baptism after a main rite of renun-

100 Augustine, *S.* 215, 1.

101 Sy 2, 1.1: "*Sacramentum symboli quod accepistis, memoriaeque mandatum pro vestra salute retinetis, noveritis hoc esse fidei catholicae fundamentum [...]*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 335; Finn, *ACW* 60 (2004), 51). Vopřada (2020), 176–177 suggests connections to Augustine's *Conf.* 1X–X.

102 Quasten (1942), 213 (Quasten (1956), 104).

ciation and profession of faith, which may have but did not necessarily take place on Easter Vigil—as suggested by a number of scholars for *Iud.*<sup>103</sup> It is perhaps more likely that the sermons were preached at least a week before Easter but there is no evidence to corroborate this hypothesis. Moreover, there is no reason to suggest, as scholars have stated on the basis of hasty conclusions drawn from Augustine's material, that the creed was first handed over to candidates on a Saturday two weeks before Easter, then recited the next Saturday night, the sermons being preached on the following day, Sunday a week before Easter.<sup>104</sup> Although the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus could broadly correspond both to a "handing over" or to a "recitation" of the creed (*traditio* and *redditio symboli*) found in Augustine as two separate rituals happening over a week and allowing time for candidates to memorise the received creed before they recite it, the sermons here discussed leave no clear clue about such a two-step process. As *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 2–3 refer to the fact that the creed was already received and recited by candidates when the sermon was preached, and *Sy* 2 mentions memorisation, it is probable that the renunciation ritual that they describe took place towards the end of the preparation. It is possible that at an earlier time, as in Augustine's community, candidates already received the text of the creed and a first explanation of it, before being allowed time to prepare for the ritual of renunciation and adhesion described in these sermons, but this has to remain a broad hypothesis. Moreover, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, Augustine's sermons do not provide evidence for a precise dating of each ceremony during Lent but only for a relative chronology and Augustine's evidence about the ritual setting of exorcisms and scrutinies, notably Sermon 216, does not correspond to the rituals described in the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus. Finally, there is no trace in the sermons of any connection of the learning of the creed to that of the Lord's Prayer, contrary to what is known from Augustine, the first to witness this practice in the West. It is plausible, however,

103 See *Gr* 1, 11.1: "*dilectissimi, qui ad gratiam acceditis*"; *Sy* 1, 1.3: "*Nondum quidem adhuc per sacrum baptismum renati estis*"; *Sy* 3, 1.3: "*Omnia sacramenta quae acta sunt et aguntur in vobis [...] esciae sunt [...] ut renatos ex baptismo hilares vos mater exhibeat Christo*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 305, 349, 441). *Sy* 2 has no evidence. *Iud* 1.7 is similarly unspecific but points to a vigil: Roetzer (1930), 150–154; de Simone (1985), 272–273; Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 472 therefore propose that it was preached at Easter Vigil.

104 Against Finn, *ACW* 60 (2004), 3–8; Ferguson (2009), 772. Vopřada (2017b), 196 places all the rites described in *Gr* 1–2 and *Sy* 1–2–3 two weeks before Easter, while Vopřada (2017c), 358–359 leaves the question open, although it seems to imply that they took place the week before Easter. Nazzaro (2001), 39, 41, 43–44 (mostly reproduced in Nazzaro (2009), 32, 35, 43, 46 and Nazzaro (2014), 522, 526, 529–530, 533), situates *Iud* and *Sy* 1–2–3 at Easter Vigil and *Cant* and *Cata* close to baptism.

that it was taught in a number of African communities, knowing that some anonymous sermons that may have been preached in Africa—but have not generally been attributed to Quodvultdeus<sup>105</sup>—comment on the Lord's Prayer, as we will see later in this chapter. Thus, while leaving many gaps in our knowledge, the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus contain unique descriptions of a prominent ritual session preceding baptism. They complement Augustine's evidence and show the complexity and variety of initiation practices in late antique Africa.

### 2.3 *"Anyone Who Desires the Baptism of Christ Aspires to a New Life"*<sup>106</sup>: *Catechesis on the Initiation Process*

Old things have passed away: what sort of old things? You were sons of Adam, sons of flesh. New things have happened: what sort of new things? That you have become sons of God, sons of spirit. Old things have passed away, you were earth; now new things have happened: you have now become almost of heaven. [...] Old things have passed, you worshipped stones, new things have come, you adore the true God. Old things have passed, mortality has passed, new things have come: immortality has been promised. [...] Old things have passed, the land of oldness has passed, new things have come, Jerusalem the city of heavenly novelty has followed. Those of you who have given their names desire to reach that new city.<sup>107</sup>

Beyond the rite of renunciation and adhesion, the nine sermons preached to candidates are precious sources to study the content of catechesis and its link with rites, shedding light on the preacher's and the audience's understanding

105 Quodvultdeus has been suggested as author by Morin for QU tr 1 = CPL 414 = CPPM 1975 (*Inc.*: "Videmus dilectissimi vestram sanctam devotionem") on the Lord's Prayer to candidates.

106 Cant 1.1: "Omnis qui baptismum Christi desiderat, vitam novam concupiscit" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 382; own translation).

107 Cant 1.17–22: "Vetera transierunt: quae vetera transierunt? Quod eratis filii adam, filii carnales. Nova accesserunt: quae nova? Quod efficiimini filii dei, filii spiritales. Vetera transierunt; terra eratis: ecce facta sunt nova; caeli iam paene effecti estis. [...] Vetera transierunt; lapides colebatis; nova accesserunt; deum verum adoratis. Vetera transierunt: transiit mortalitas: nova accesserunt; promissa est immortalitas. [...] Vetera transierunt; transiit regio vetustatis: nova accesserunt; succedit hierusalem civitas caelestis novitatis. Ad hanc civitatem novam pervenisse cupitis, qui nomina vestra conscribenda dedistis" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 382; own translation).

of the initiation process as a radical transformation of the self. The passage quoted, strikingly describing candidates as sons of God, refers to the practice of enrolment (the “giving of names”) to prepare for baptism and shows that it was understood as a major step in the acquisition of a new status within the community. The sermons all highlight the significant commitment and rules of behaviour that the progress in the initiation process implies. Despite the fact that six of them focus on the creed, all the sermons on initiation share a similar structure: they first explain the initiation and the impact that it should have on the lives of candidates, who are invited to put their ritual commitment into practice and start a new life, and they are all meant to offer candidates a comprehensive training on the core beliefs of Christians, following the specific interpretation of the community in opposition to other religious groups.

In this section, my aim is to study and compare the catechesis of each sermon by looking first at the way in which they relate the preparation for baptism to a commitment to a new way of life and the language and imagery employed to refer to candidates preparing for baptism. I suggest that catechesis aimed at accompanying the ritual process by constantly stressing the necessity to conform one's life to the ritual training received. This function of the catechesis extended to the whole community, making of the initiation process an opportunity for renewing the commitment of all. I then more specifically compare the style of the explanations given, particularly on the creed, and explore to what extent they diverge in the emphasis put on polemical debates, assessing the significance of the “single Church” mentioned in the creed in the context of competition between rival Christian churches. Despite the fact that most sermons are similar in structure and content, significant differences emerge, which highlight the fluid nature of catechesis and initiation.

### 2.3.1 The Impact of Performance: Initiation Imagery and Community Dynamics

The sermons all start with a discussion of the preparation for baptism as a process that brings candidates to a new status within the community and has an impact on the whole community. The initiation of catechumens, as already stressed in our study of Augustine, had the function of renewing the commitment of all. Although all the sermons are primarily addressed to candidates, they all hint at the fact that the broader community of the faithful was also present and in particular women—often more specifically virgins (*virgines*)—probably an important group within the audience of some of the sermons, as we will see. The sermons often combine moral exhortations to candidates with references to the community of the baptised, with the aim of creating greater cohesion.



Sy 1 and 3 start with long exhortations to candidates to renounce spectacles in the circus and the theatre.<sup>108</sup> While Sy 3 briefly asks candidates to put the renunciation into practice by avoiding the bad example of *fideles* who pray in the church and then go to the theatre,<sup>109</sup> Sy 1 is much more detailed, drawing a comparison, like Augustine often did, between the mundane spectacles in the theatre and the spiritual spectacles in the church.<sup>110</sup> Looking for remarkable contests in the Old Testament that can compare with spectacles in the circus, the preacher evokes the fight between Esau and Jacob in Rebekah's womb, where Esau represents the Jews and Jacob the predestined Christians who are received in baptism by the *fideles* as godparents.<sup>111</sup> In contrast, Gr 1 focuses at length on sins arising from the five senses, particularly adultery resulting from sight—although spectacles are also mentioned in contrast to churchgoing—and reflects on Jesus' sayings on cutting off one's limb and plucking out one's eye to avoid temptation (Mt 18, 8–9), complemented with reference to Paul's letters (Eph 5, 29 and 1 Tim 6, 10).<sup>112</sup> The preacher particularly refers to chaste men and virgin women in the audience (*sancti dei continentes et virgines*) to argue against castration and for a spiritual reading of the New Testament, thus exhorting the audience to cut off evil in themselves rather than harm their body.<sup>113</sup> Sy 3 also directly addresses the virgins in the audience when commenting on Christ's Incarnation and Passion, emphasising the role of Christ as a mediator restoring the fallen man and exhorting virgins to praise virginity and imitate Mary despite the fact that they are not mothers.<sup>114</sup> The preacher of *Cata* also seems to have had women particularly in mind, his final

108 On this theme and the renunciation see Van Slyke (2005).

109 Sy 3, 1.13: "*Deprehenderis enim et detegeris, christiane, quando aliud agis et aliud profiteris: fidelis in nomine, aliud demonstrans in opere, non tenens promissionis tuae fidem; modo ingrediens ecclesiam orationes fundere, post modicum in spectaculis histrionibus impudice clamare*" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 350).

110 See for instance Augustine, S. 51, 1.2.

111 Sy 1, 11.10–27, esp. 21: "*Ille enim Iacob unus parvulus sic garriens, multos in se praedestinos etiam parvulos monstrabat infantes, qui ex utero matris suscipiuntur manibus fidelium, nec eos sic excutiunt, ut in aere pendeant, sed ut renati in caelo vivant*" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 309). It is difficult here to know whether the preacher only primarily had in mind small children or also adults as *infantes* born in baptism.

112 Gr 1, III–V.

113 Gr 1, VI–VII.

114 Sy 3, IV.20–22: "*Gaudete, virgines sanctae, virgo peperit Christum. Non vos contristet sterilitas, quarum fides magna est fecunditas; nec doleatis non vos esse matres, quae spiritaliter generatis, virgines permanetis, filios suscipitis, integritatem non amittitis. [...] Imitamini fideles matrem capiti vestri, sponsi vestri: non vobis denegavit pignora, qui natus est de virgine Maria*" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 355).

words focusing on married women and recommending them to avoid wearing precious garments and jewellery.<sup>115</sup>

*Gr* 2, a continuation of the commentary on the creed started in *Gr* 1, also includes moral exhortations on the rites to be celebrated: the context of war leads the preacher to reply to those who blame God for the difficult times and argue for the necessity to hurry to baptism. Speaking in terms close to Augustine's conceptions, the preacher notes that God is just and can ask for debts from sins at any time since no one is free from sin, but all are sinners after Adam,<sup>116</sup> further underlining that the exegesis planned in *Gr* 1 on the arch, David and Michal in 2 Samuel 6, 16–23, is most appropriate for the situation, the Flood resembling the current war and the story providing a mysterious figure of the Passion of Christ.<sup>117</sup> In its explanation, *Gr* 2 also includes a discussion of the Eucharist referring to the fact that the faithful (*fideles*) know the rite in contrast to the candidates, a kind of veiled allusion pointing to the fact that the rite is hidden from the uninitiated—the *disciplina arcani*, a practice commonly attested in late antique preaching as we have seen in Chapter 2.<sup>118</sup> The connection between the preacher and the faithful in the audience served as a way to trigger the curiosity of candidates and their wish to become part of the community of the baptised.

The preacher of *Iud* makes clear that the commentary on the creed can only follow after an explanation of the renunciation: starting from original sin, *Iud* contains a long admonition to renounce the inheritance of Adam in the expectation of the last Judgment.<sup>119</sup> Drawing a comparison with the contemporary practice of justice, the preacher imagines the last Judgment as a trial opposing human beings as orphans (*pupilli*) and the Devil over the debt contracted with the Father, the apostles acting as defence lawyers exhorting all to renounce the Devil.<sup>120</sup> The preacher imagines a discussion between the Devil and God, which

115 *Cata* VI.24: "Intendite, coniugatae, qualis huius vobis ab scriptura sancta imitatio proponatur. Non enim eam praedicat, quod fuerit auro, monilibus vel veste pretiosa forinsecus compta, cum fuerit intus pudore castitatis ornata" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 419–420).

116 *Gr* 2, II–III.

117 *Gr* 2, IV–VI, esp. IV.2–3: "Sit licet gladius belli, sit horrenda fames, abundant morbi et pestilentiae; nobis ista omnia diluvium inantur. Non ergo irrideat anima arcam fabricantem, aut illum regem ante arcam ludentem" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 461).

118 *Gr* 2, IX.1: "In isto autem fidelibus noto iocundoque convivio" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 465).

119 *Iud* II–III, esp. II.1: "Prius tamen, dilectissimi, discutiamus qui sit vel quid sit diabolus et quae sint pompae eius, quibus renuntiantes opera deponimus tenebrarum" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 228).

120 *Iud* III.1: "Renuntiemus huic damnosae haereditati: pupilli effecti sumus. [...] Adhibeamus huic pupillo idoneos defensores et apostolorum chorum tanquam iuris peritorum caelestium patrocinium subrogemus" etc. (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 230).

shall focus on an examination of debts still to repay by each individual and a profession of faith to ascertain whether they shall be given to the Devil or to God. *Iud* therefore exhorts the candidates to keep renouncing the Devil and adhering to the faith that they have professed after their baptism, avoiding the bad example of some baptised Christians, particularly focusing on those who attend shows in the circus and the amphitheatre.<sup>121</sup>

Sy 2 likewise exhorts the audience to penance and good works referring to the trial at the end of times, and to the three days of the Resurrection representing the three ages, before the law, under the law and under grace, identifying the current age as the third when penance is needed to be resurrected with Christ.<sup>122</sup> Persevering against sin is also a central concern of Sy 1–2–3 in the explanation of the article of the creed on the forgiveness of sin, Sy 2 and 3 underlining that baptism will cleanse candidates from all sins. Sy 2 focuses on both original and own sins (*propria*),<sup>123</sup> Sy 3 points to the freedom of a new life that they will obtain to fight the Devil and Sy 1 concentrates on the need to stick to the profession of faith by following God's will until death comes.<sup>124</sup> The exhortative catechesis of *Fer* makes full use of agricultural imagery, starting from the mention of five yokes of oxen in the reading of the day from Lk 14, 15–24 (the parable of the great banquet). The preacher describes his ministry as agriculture, throwing the seed of the word of God, removing thorns of bad desires, burning them through divine fire and asking for fruits in return.<sup>125</sup> Candidates are exhorted to follow the examples of Stephen, Cyprian, Lawrence and all the martyrs in keeping their faith rather than the bad example of Judas.<sup>126</sup>

121 *Iud* III–IV.

122 Sy 2, VI; Augustine, *Qu. eu.* 1, 7 commenting on the three days does not have this interpretation.

123 Sy 2, X.1: "*Omnius prorsus delicta delet sanctum baptismum, et originalia et propria*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 346–347). A similar phrase in *Iud* XIX.6.

124 Sy 3, X.2: "*Deonerabitur anima sarcinis peccatorum, ut libertate novae vitae induta, adversus diabolum cum adiutorio divino valeat fortiter dimicare*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 361); Sy 1, X.13–17.

125 *Fer* I.6: "*Nos ea ipsa quinque iuga in agro dominico iungamus, terram durissimam sulcis spiritalibus exaremus, semen verbi Dei proicientes, quascumque spinas malarum cupiditatum invenerimus, evellamus, eradicemus, divino igne succendamus*"; II.5: "*Accipe verbum domini, omnis ager, omnis homo, sive sterilis, sive fecundus: ego spargam, tu vide quomodo accipias; ego erogem, tu vide quales fructus reddas*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 395–396). Agricultural imagery is also employed at length in Sy 2, XI comparing the planting of seeds in the field to the transformation brought by God in the resurrection of the flesh. Lk 14, 15–24 is also discussed in Augustine, *S.* 112, 3–4 but with a different interpretation, see Vopřada (2020), 214–215 comparing the texts.

126 *Fer* IV.6–7: "*Responde sicut respondit beatus Stephanus, qui in isto agro dominico ut bonus*

The preacher is attentive to stress that baptism is meant to forgive all sins and that they should preserve this new state after baptism.<sup>127</sup>

*Cant* and *Cata* employ the metaphor of travelling to describe the initiation: for *Cant* candidates have begun the new journey leading to the heavenly city and must hold fast to Christ as a pilot (*gubernator*) as they cross the sea, where sins are the main challenge.<sup>128</sup> The preacher then extends the metaphor of travel, by focusing on those who fear the sea and prefer to travel by land, on horseback. This comparison leads the preacher to focus on Christ as the way, and on fasting as the proper means to tame the horse, borrowing from Augustine's preaching on Lent.<sup>129</sup> *Cata* employs the same imagery of travelling on seas to prepare candidates to receive baptism and to ask them to persevere against sin after baptism.<sup>130</sup> As in other sermons, the preacher sees life as a fight against the Devil and rebukes the audience against attending shows and leaving the church empty.<sup>131</sup> He also devotes a significant portion of his sermon to demonstrate to candidates that the rites that they expected for so long and are about to experience are not that unremarkable as it may seem to them.<sup>132</sup> The catechesis in this case has the function to anticipate rather than recapitulate the rites: *Cata*, probably preached close to baptism, can be described as a baptismal catechesis. It provides an explanation of the spiritual

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*colonus plurimum laborando genu fixit, atque de terra petrosa vulneratus, ex ea lapides in suo corpore tanquam in sinu suo collegit [...]. Responde sicut respondit Cyprianus, Laurentius, ceterique sancti pueri et puellae, aetas omnis et uterque sexus, qui percipientes sanguinem Christi, testimonium dicentes, et non negantes nomen Christi, pro sanguine quem biberunt, sanguinem suum fundere non dubitaverunt* (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 400).

127 *Fer* VII.3–4.

128 *Cant* II (discussed in Vopřada (2017b), 185–187). This imagery is employed as well in AN h Esc 28 (*Inc.*: “Spiritus Dei consilium porrigit”) of the Viennese collection published by Leroy (1999), 188–191 which alludes to the commitment of the profession of faith (“*serva promissi fidem*”) and the fight against the Devil (“*pugna cum diabolo*”) perhaps hinting at the baptismal preparation. Besides another reference to the sign of the cross in the sermon entitled “De principiis christiani nominis” (AN h Esc 49; *Inc.*: “*Christiana generositas prima sortis suae fidei*”), there is no other clear evidence in these sermons about the catechumenate.

129 *Cant* III–IV, esp. III.4–5: “*Caro nostra iumentum nostrum est: iter agimus in Hierusalem; plerumque nos rapit, et de via conatur excludere. Tale ergo iumentum cohibeamus ieiuniis*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 385). See note 69.

130 *Cata* I; at I.7, the Eucharist is compared to the *annona*: “*Baptizatus es, signatus es regio caractere, coepisti consequi annonam de mensa regis tui*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 409).

131 *Cata* II.7: “*Fide pedes, non nutent vestigia tua frequentando spectacula et deserendo ecclesiam*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 410).

132 *Cata* III.1: “*non dicatis in cordibus vestris: hoc est totum quod pro magno desiderabamus?*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 410).

meaning of water—a *sacramentum* when consecrated by the ritual words—and more broadly the figures of baptism in the Bible, through the exegesis of a set of key passages, in particular the widely attested baptismal interpretation of the crossing of the Red Sea and the origin of baptism from Christ's side on the cross.<sup>133</sup>

In summary, the sermons aim to show the significance of the rites—either already celebrated or expected—and the new commitment that they entail, employing vivid imagery to convey a sense of the struggle against sin. The faithful have two significant functions in this initiation process: first, they have a supporting role in the rites, witnessing the renunciation and adhesion; second, they serve as examples, either to be followed or avoided by candidates. The candidates are in turn fully part of the community and essential for its cohesion: their initiation, happening in conjunction with the period of liturgical preparation for the Passion and Resurrection, is the final step in their incorporation into the Christian community. Candidates can prepare for baptism only because they have already become members of the community as catechumens through the sign of the cross on the forehead. Sy 1 and 3 both describe the Church as mother and the candidates as babies conceived in the womb during the catechumenate and now about to be born, a theme which has been shown to be often exploited by Augustine.<sup>134</sup> Both sermons relate this progressive birth to the cross, strongly echoing Augustine's preaching on the cross on the forehead of catechumens: "You have not yet been reborn through holy baptism, rather through the sign of the cross you have now been conceived in the womb of the holy church"; "Holy Mother the Church [...] has conceived you in the womb through this most holy sign of the cross".<sup>135</sup> This imagery, in connection to the ritual of signing foreheads with the cross—also later employed by John the deacon in his letter to Senarius—well describes the stage in which candidates have been since entering the catechumenate and from where they can progress in the initiation towards a new birth. Similarly, *Cata* mentions the cross on the forehead of candidates as the spiritual transposition of the

133 *Cata* III–IV. See de Simone (1985) and Vopřada (2020), 240–254 for typologies in the catecheses. On the Red Sea episode figuring baptism see for instance Rufinus, *Origenis in Exodum homiliae* v, 5.

134 Also noted in Vopřada (2020), 134–135. On this theme in "Quodvultdeus": Peper (2011), 204–214.

135 Sy 1, 1.3: "Nondum quidem adhuc per sacrum baptismum renati estis, sed per crucis signum in utero sanctae matris ecclesiae iam concepti estis"; Sy 3, 1.1: "Dum per sacratissimum crucis signum vos suscepit in utero sancta mater ecclesia" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 305 and 349; Finn, *ACW* 60 (2004), 23 and 67).

killing of the lamb for the Jewish Passover in Ex 12, 22–23 when doorsteps were marked with blood, and quotes Gal 6, 14 on being proud of Christ's glory only—both biblical references are commonly discussed by Augustine in connection to the rite.<sup>136</sup> When developing the metaphor of agriculture, *Fer* also provides a remarkable reference to the cross on the forehead of candidates: they are like earth full of thorns and arid because they are born from sin and need to be prepared by the plough of the cross and heavenly rain to become fertile, these images referring respectively to the sign of the cross put on their forehead and to baptism in Christ's death—quoting Rm 6, 3.<sup>137</sup> References to the cross to describe the membership status of Christians find further echo in several of the sermons, and are linked to moral exhortations against “bad” Christians, in the same fashion as in Augustine's sermons.<sup>138</sup> Thus, because Christian belonging is shared between the candidates and the baptised, through the initiation process, the preacher more broadly reaches the whole community to explain beliefs and suggest rules of behaviour, and to rebuke members of the faithful. Moreover, candidates going through the font were thought to be closer to the divine, as the calls to candidates to pray for the preacher make clear.<sup>139</sup> The ser-

136 *Cata* IV.5: “*Demonstra et tu, Israhel spiritalis, fili Abrahae secundum fidem, non secundum carnem, demonstra et tu quomodo celebres pascha: habes agnum occisum, demonstra. Ecce agnus dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi* (John 1, 29). *Linis sanguine eius postes domus tuae: demonstra et dic: ecce crux sanguinis Christi in frontibus est pudoris nostri. Dic cum Paulo: Mihi absit gloriari, nisi in cruce domini nostri Iesu Christi* (Gal 6, 14)” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 413); see for instance Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 50, 2 (Ex 12, 22–23); S. 27, 6 (Gal 6, 14). See more in Pignot (2019).

137 *Fer* I–II, esp. II.12: “*Vis nosse qualis tibi adhibeatur cultura, qualis te desuper perfundat gratia? Ecce agnosce, Christi cruce exararis, quando eius signo in fronte signaris; eius sanguine rigaris, quando in morte ipsius baptizaris. Quotquot enim, ait apostolus, in Christo baptizati sumus, in morte ipsius baptizati sumus* (Rm 6, 3)” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 397).

138 Thus, the discussion of the crucifixion leads Sy 3, v.1–3 to argue against those who would be ashamed of the cross, and in the same fashion as Sy 1, I.9 to describe the cross as the banner used in the fight against the Devil. Sy 2, v.1–2 and v.19 emphasises shame and the opposition between pride and humility quoting Gal 6, 14 and stresses that the cross is now adopted by kings in the whole world, a theme which is found in *Gr* 1, IX.13 too, against Jews, specifying that the cross is on the forehead of kings. *Gr* 1, IX.11 also notes that those who seem pagan are in fact heretics (*perfidus christianos*) as shown by their forehead. The same preacher in *Gr* 2, I.3 describes his audience as those who are “found (*invenimini*)” rather than “said (*dicimini*)” Christian (*christiani*). All this finds close parallels in Augustine's evidence (see *In Ps.* 30, II, 2, 7; S. 160, 5; 215, 5 etc.).

139 *Cant* X.11: “[...] *sed merces nostra est, ut in illo sancto fonte adiuvetis nos orationibus vestris*”; *Fer* VII.5–6: “[...] *atque pro nostra mercede in illo sacratissimo fonte, pro nobis orate. Orate pro pace, orate pro liberatione huius terrae; orate ut misereatur qui iuste indignatur*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 392 and 406). Augustine refers to newly baptised performing miracles see *Ciu.* XXII, 8.4.

mons strive to convince the audience that the initiation rites, which take place during Lent, should be part of a wider effort of the community to do penance, display good Christian conduct and follow ascetic practices. They reveal that the preparation for baptism served as a moment of reflection, assessment and self-definition for the whole Christian community.

### 2.3.2 Commentaries on the Creed and Polemical Debates

The training of candidates not only consisted in exhortations to follow an impeccable conduct. Polemics against religious opponents were a major stake of the catechesis and were meant to inculcate the “correct” beliefs in candidates and give them tools to recognise heretics and build their Christian identity in opposition to rival groups.<sup>140</sup> This is a particularly important concern in the six sermons on the creed. However, polemics also feature prominently in the other sermons. In this section, particularly focusing on the commentaries on the creed and comparing them with the other sermons, I explore the polemical character of catechesis and show that each sermon displays different styles and changing emphasis on religious polemics, while most cast light on a tense context of competition for candidates in fifth-century Africa.

All commentaries on the creed broadly share the same structure and purpose, but use different styles of presentation and peculiar emphasis on the contents of the creed. *Sy* 1 is the most linear commentary, systematically referring to each article in full before commenting on it. *Sy* 2 is close to *Sy* 1, although it is much shorter and does not refer but only imply the article on the birth of Jesus from the virgin Mary. *Sy* 3 is similarly short but less systematic, as it directly refers to some articles but often only gives the first words. However, the first articles on the Father and the Son and the Passion and Resurrection are not mentioned. *Iud* comments at length on most articles, although it rarely quotes the creed and dedicates little discussion to the articles on the crucifixion and the Resurrection. *Gr* 1 and *Gr* 2 are free commentaries, quoting the creed very rarely but following its broad structure. Because of the length of *Gr* 1, the explanation is interrupted as it reaches the articles on the Son and the rest of the creed, which are discussed in *Gr* 2.<sup>141</sup> *Iud*, *Gr* 1 and 2 and *Sy* 1 are

<sup>140</sup> See Perrin, M.-Y., (2010), ‘The Limits of the Heresiological Ethos in Late Antiquity’, in Bangert, S., Gwynn, D.M., (eds.), (2010), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden-Boston), 199–227; Perrin (2017); Whelan (2018), 55–87; Vopřada (2020), 257–275.

<sup>141</sup> The exact text of the creed commented in each sermon cannot be fully reconstructed since none of them quotes all the articles in full. Moreover, they all allude to the articles in quite different ways. Contrary to Vopřada (2020), 167–168, I see no reason to follow Westra (2002), 176 who states that “it seems improbable to assume that Quodvultdeus taught his

wordy, strongly polemical, and therefore include a very long discussion of articles that best relate to controversies: more than a third of *Sy 1* is devoted to anti-Arian polemics when discussing the articles: “I believe in God almighty”, “I believe in the Holy Spirit” and in a conclusion on “the holy Church”. *Gr 1* is almost entirely focused on the first article on God almighty and on the Incarnation of the Son, the preacher briefly concluding on the articles on Christ and planning to include a detailed commentary on the story of David dancing for Michal (2 Samuel 6, 16–23) that is discussed in *Gr 2*.<sup>142</sup> *Gr 2*, preached some time later, concentrates as planned on the story in Samuel as a commentary on the remaining articles of the creed, focusing particularly on the Passion.<sup>143</sup> After a long discussion of the first article on the Father against heretics, particularly Arians, *Iud* devotes a significant portion of the sermon on Jesus as son of God and also concentrates on the articles on the Spirit and on the Church, as do *Sy 1* and *Gr 2*, openly attacking Arians.<sup>144</sup> *Gr 1* and 2, *Iud* and *Sy 1* all strive to demonstrate the unity of the Trinity as a Catholic doctrine, mostly on the basis of a commentary of key and traditional passages of Scripture that constitute the core of the dispute. However, the commentaries of *Gr 1* and *Iud* slightly differ from *Sy 1*: although devoting significantly more space to Arians, they include refutations of other groups: *Iud* particularly attacks Manichaeans when commenting on an article from the Nicene creed on the relationship between the Father and the Son (in the form *lux de lumine*), while *Gr 1* first reproves heretics, pagans and Jews in general—the classic triad of opponents<sup>145</sup>—before refuting each at a time.<sup>146</sup> Starting with pagan conceptions of God, *Gr 1* only briefly opposes Jews and concentrates on what is described as a selection of heretics,

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catechumens three or more different versions of the Creed” and erases differences to suggest a single model creed. There have been many other attempts to reconstruct creeds from these sermons, see for instance Hahn (1897), 60–61; Kelly (1972), 175–176; recently Mbonigaba (2015), 131; Kinzig (2017a), II, 310–321 (reconstruction at 319).

142 *Gr 1*, VIII–XV on the first article concerning God the Father; XVI–XIX on Christ.

143 *Gr 1*, XIX.8: “*Sed quia hodie amplius onerandi non estis, ne in prolixum sermo discurrens vestris auribus fastidium ingerat, in alium diem, quem dominus donaverit, tenete me debitorem*”; *Gr 2*, I.1: “*Scio quid, adiuvante domino, promiserim caritati vestrae, et tempus esse reddendi debiti utrique cognoscimus*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 458–459).

144 *Iud* V–VIII on the Father and the Son; IX–XVII on Christ; XIX–XX and XXII on the Spirit and the Church; *Sy 1*, IX–XIII; *Gr 2*, XI–XIII.

145 See Cracco Ruggini, L., (1980), ‘Pagani, Ebrei e Cristiani: odio sociologico e odio teologico nel mondo antico’, in *Gli Ebrei nell’alto medioevo* 1 (Spoleto), 13–101; Massa (2017).

146 *Iud* VI.1: “*Lux de lumine: duo videntur sonare luminaria. Sed absit a nobis ne nos error manichaeorum comprehendat, qui istum solem aestimant esse Christum*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 233); *Gr 1*, VIII.



the Manichaeans, the Sabellians and finally the Arians to demonstrate that they all represent extreme and wrong interpretations of the first article on the Father.<sup>147</sup>

*Iud* also argues against Jews, pagans and Arians at length, with a peculiar concern to provide proofs against them about prophecies of the Incarnation of Jesus the Son of God. The preacher therefore compiles long lists of biblical proofs and references to Jesus in pagan writings, particularly quoting Virgil's Fourth Eclogue and extracts from the Sibylline Oracles that go back to Lactantius' *Institutiones* and the eighteenth book of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.<sup>148</sup> It is worth reflecting on the impact of such long quotations on our understanding of the context of preaching: it is possible that *Iud* was dictated to be preached, perhaps as a model, rather than the result of improvisation. This sermon may have been composed in connection to the diffusion of the eighteenth book of the *De civitate Dei* in Carthage among catechumens in the 420s, before 426–427.<sup>149</sup> *Gr* 1 and *Sy* 1, on the contrary, include clear references to the audience: while indulging in long polemical digressions, the preacher of *Sy* 1 seems to have been aware of the fact that the audience only had limited patience.<sup>150</sup> Likewise, *Gr* 1 spares tired hearers, cutting short the explanation of 2 Samuel 6, 16–23 to be discussed in *Gr* 2.<sup>151</sup>

In contrast to these sermons, *Sy* 2 and 3 prefer short explanations with smooth transitions, have a less marked polemical emphasis against Arians and do not include any anti-Arian discourse in their explanations of the first articles on the Father and the Son. They both start with a discussion on faith and vision—which again recalls Augustine's conceptions—that leads to the problem of believing in God invisible, creator of all things. In *Sy* 3 it is discussed

147 *Gr* 1, VIII–XV (XI–XV against Arians), esp. VIII.1: “*Omnipotentem deum dum credit fides catholica, omnium haeticorum, paganorum, iudaeorumque destruit falsa commenta*”; X.1: “*Verumtamen quoniam multi sunt qui occurrunt, duo aut tres commemorentur, ut omnes in istis pariter destruantur*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 446 and 449).

148 *Iud* X–XVIII; Lactantius, *Institutiones* VII, 16.11 and 20.3; IV, 18; Augustine, *Civ.* XVIII, 23.1–2 (details of the borrowings in Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 248–250); see also for the use of Virgil, Augustine, *Ep.* 104, 3.11. This undermines the argument (see, with bibliography, Vopřada (2020), 207–209) that would connect this sermon and the *Liber promissionum* because of the similar use of these sources in the *Liber*; similarities can be explained because of a tradition more broadly shared.

149 See Augustine, *Ep.* 1A\* and Pignot (2016). On the Christian use of Virgil's passage see Courcelle (1959).

150 *Sy* 1, VI.28: “*Si enim de singulis, ut dignum est, loqui possemus, prolixitas sermonis fastidium vobis quam delectationem incuteret*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 323).

151 *Gr* 1, XIX.

by comparing Old Testament extracts about seeing God (Ps 33, 16; Is 52, 7; 2 Kings 6, 18; Num 12, 7–8; Ex 33, 11.13.20) with John 14, 21.23 and 1 Tim 6, 16, and solved by rejecting the heretical idea of a corporeal God, suggesting that Scripture has to be read through figures (*figuris*) to find the truth.<sup>152</sup> In Sy 2, this leads to a long critique of idolatry as the worship of creatures on the basis of Gen 1, addressed against pagans and unnamed heretics. The preacher lets each worshipped creature speak against such practice, before reaffirming God as creator—demonstrated by a set of biblical quotations—and rejecting pagan deities.<sup>153</sup> Sy 2 is marginally concerned with Arians: it simply refers to them and other heretics in the explanation of the article of the creed on the Holy Spirit, after demonstrating the unity of the Trinity with the metaphor of the fire, its flame, brilliance and heat manifested as one light.<sup>154</sup> Sy 3 starts to attack Arians only in its commentary on the Spirit and on the Church, when it reaches its polemical climax. As Gr 1 and Sy 1, it employs biblical references to explain the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and strongly advises the audience to beware of heretics as wolves attacking the sheep in the Church.<sup>155</sup>

The three other sermons given to candidates also focus on polemics at length. *Fer* refers to a list of heretics present in Africa, including Manichaeans, Pelagians and Arians, the latter being particularly attacked in the conclusion of the sermon on the Church.<sup>156</sup> *Cata* gives a list of opponents as well, this time

152 Sy 3, II–III, esp. III.11–12: “*Ne forte subrepat perversus intellectus, aut haereticus sensus, et putet quis deum esse corporeum, vigilet pia fides et catholica doctrina. Mysticis enim figuris loquitur divina scriptura, servans rebus tempora, quibus recognitis manifesta exerceat veritate*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 353).

153 Sy 2, II–III, esp. II.4–5: “*Et erravit anima a vero ut pro deo coleret idola, et adoraret ipsa quae fecit, deserendo illum a quo facta est. Adorando enim lapidem nullam habentem vitam, ipsa perit, deserendo deum qui est eius vera et aeterna vita. Hinc error omnis, et desertio bonorum: hinc cultus paganorum, et perversitas haereticorum*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 335–336). Again, here Vopřada (2020), 177 believes that the preacher draws on Augustine’s *Conf.* IX–X.

154 Sy 2, IX.12: “*Haec propter haereticos arrianos vel alios qui aliter de Deo sentiunt quam dignum est, dicta sunt vestrae caritati*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 346).

155 Sy 3, IX, esp. IX.9–11: “*Quomodo exultas, arriane, quod teneas veritatem, cum te malus error a catholica doctrina separans, haereticumque protestans, a communione totius orbis secernens, in uno angulo damnaverit? [...] Cavete fures, cavete latrones: non quiescit pastor clamare, non sinit etiam suos canes tacere. Non se sequestret ovis a summo pastore, ne ipsa se in depraedationem nequissimi offerrat lupi raptoris*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 361).

156 *Fer* VI–VII, esp. VI.2: “*Dum te quaero in meridie, id est in Africa, ecce greges sodalium tuorum, scholae pessimae haereticorum, fraus manichaeorum, nequitia pelagianorum, superba congregatio arrianorum*” (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 403).

referring to Donatists, Maximianists, Manichaeans and Pelagians as defeated and Arians as a resurgent heresy.<sup>157</sup> The inclusion of Maximianists in the list—a dissident group within the Donatist community, emerging in 393–394—is particularly remarkable since it is the only mention found in any sermon outside Augustine, again suggesting a common environment.<sup>158</sup> The sermon then embarks in vivid polemics against heresies as snakes, with reference to the fight of Moses with the Pharaoh's magicians (Ex 7, 9–13). This polemic at length focuses on Arians again asserting the unity of the Trinity with a set of essential biblical quotations.<sup>159</sup> Then, extending his exegesis on Moses' staff (*virga*), the preacher sees it as a figure of the cross of Christ in link to Eph 3, 13–18 and in particular Paul's reference to the four dimensions of Christ's love (*quae sit altitudo et latitudo, longitudo et profundum*), and interpreting the cross as a ladder to go to heaven through good works. Hearers are invited to imitate those who have climbed this ladder, listing Old and New Testament figures fitting for each age, gender and condition with a particular focus on feminine figures (Tobias, Joseph, Mary, Hannah, Susanna).<sup>160</sup> In *Cant*, excerpting a passage of a sermon of Augustine, three types of individuals are described: those who linger are to be exhorted, those who go back are to be recalled, those

157 *Cata* v.7–9: “Fuit hic, ut nostis, dilectissimi, viperea doctrina donatistarum: contrita est, consumpta est. Mox maximianistarum serpentina fraus pullulavit: contrita est, consumpta est. Manichaeorum venenum aspidis subreperat: contritum est, consumptum est; pelagianorum novum dogma, a ministris diaboli tanquam magis pharaonis excitatum, illi nostro serpenti certamen indixit: conteritur, consumitur” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 415).

158 Apart from Augustine's anti-Donatist treatises (*Bapt.*; *Breuc.*; *Cath. fr.*; *Cresc.*; *C. Don.*; *Emer.*; *C. ep. Parm.*; *C. Gaud.*; *C. litt. Pet.*), and letters (*Ep.* 51, 53, 76, 93, 108, 129, 185) and a mention in *C. Iul.* III, 5, among Augustine's preached texts, Maximianists are evoked in *In ps.* 21, II, 31; 36, 2, 19 and 22–23; 54, 26; 57, 15 and *S.* 71, 2.4; 88, 22.25; 138, 10; 164, 8.12. They are also found in the pseudo-Augustinian treatise, perhaps from the fifth century, *Adversus Fulgentium Donatistam* XXIII and 13–15 (Lambot, C., (1948), ‘L'écrit attribué à s. Augustin *Adversus Fulgentium Donatistam*’, *RBen* 58, 177–222, at 210 and 218). On the Maximianists see Weidmann, C., (2010), ‘Maximianistae, Maximianus’, *AL* 3, fasc. 7/8, 1209–1211.

159 *Cata* v.10–37.

160 *Cata* VI.10–24, esp. 20–22: “Imitentur senes mores Tobiae, qui cum caecus esset corpore, viam vitae filio demonstrabat in corde. Ille eum manu ducebat in terra, et pater monendo eum perducebat ad caelum. Imitentur adolescentes Ioseph sanctum, pulchrum corpore, pulchriorem mente: quem castitas sic possederat, ut irruentes minae dominae mulieris impudicae non possent eum violare, nec corpore, cuius iam deus possederat mentem. Imitentur virgines sanctae sanctam domini sui matrem Mariam. Imitentur viduae religiosam viduam Annam. Imitentur et coniugatae castam Susannam” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 419). On early Christian discussions of Mose's *virga* see Dulaey, M., (1990), ‘Le bâton changé en serpent (Ex 7, 8–13)’, in Bruning, B., Lamberigts, M., Houtem, J. van, (eds.), (1990), *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T.J. Van Bavel*, 2 volumes (Leuven), 2, 781–795.

who go astray are to be shown the way.<sup>161</sup> For the preacher, those who linger on the way are those who trust in themselves, those who turn back are those who abandon chastity and those who go astray are heretics.<sup>162</sup> The preacher concentrates on the third aspect in the rest of his sermon, teaching to candidates ways to recognise heretics: Christ should only be preached openly (*palam, publice*) rather than in secret (*occulte*), and through the Scriptures.<sup>163</sup> He more specifically attacks Manichaeans who preach in secret and follow their own *scriptura*, before refuting Arians, who deny that Christ is equal to the Father on the basis of Gn 1, and finally Pelagians (*perversa doctrina*) who have the Devil as father as they trust in themselves instead of only glorifying their creator.<sup>164</sup> The preacher exhorts candidates to avoid all these heretics, before concluding on a description of the afterlife of contemplation that is close to Augustine's sermons.<sup>165</sup>

### 2.3.3 The Mother Church and Fight for Belonging

The nine sermons end with a discussion of the Church, providing a particularly interesting case to assess the special emphasis on anti-Arian polemics: such emphasis is clearly visible in all sermons except *Cant*, *Cata* and *Sy* 2.<sup>166</sup> The polemic particularly plays on the metaphor of the Church as bride of Christ and mother of Christians opposed to the Arian Church as an illegitimate partner of Christ. This has to be set within the background of a recurring interpretation of Jesus' Passion as a wedding with the Church, born out of Jesus' side on the cross as a new Eve, a virgin who gives birth to Christians in baptism, particularly in *Sy* 1—the theme is also evoked in *Cata*, *Fer*, *Gr* 1, *Iud* and *Sy* 2 and often developed

161 *Cant*. III.6–IV, 8: “*Ambulas enim, si amas. Non enim ad deum passibus, sed affectibus currimus. Via ergo ista nostra ambulantes quaerit. Tria sunt hominum genera quae odit: remanentem, retro redeuntem, aberrantem. Ab his tribus generibus malis, domino adiuvante, vindicetur et defendatur gressus noster. [...] et qui tardius et qui celerius ambulamus*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 385–386) = Augustine, *S.* 306B (= Denis 18), 1 with minor variants.

162 *Cant* IV.9–13: “*Qui sunt et retro redeuntes? Qui ex continentia revertuntur in immunditiam, qui ex sancto et singulari bono proposito virginitatis divertuntur in turpitudines voluptatis, et corrupta mente corrumpunt simul et carnem. [...] Qui sunt et aberrantes? Omnes haeretici, qui relicta veritatis via, errando per desertum latrocinantur*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 386). At *Cant*. IV, 11 the preacher mentions the example of Lot's wife who looked back on the way and was changed into a statue of salt (Gn 19, 26), interpreting the story in the same way as Augustine as an exhortation to keep one's commitment (see Chapter 2, note 68).

163 *Cant* v.3: “*Christus enim veritas est; per scripturas sanctas praedicatur; non in angulis, non occulte, sed palam, publice*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 386–387).

164 *Cant* VI (Manichaeans), VII (Arians), VIII (Pelagians).

165 *Cant* IX–X; see for instance Augustine, *S.* 216, 4.

166 See Vopřáda (2020), 224–230 and 257–302 for a detailed study of the sermons' polemical ecclesiology.

by Augustine.<sup>167</sup> In Sy 3—*Fer*, *Gr* 2 and *Iud* drawing similar comparisons—the Church (*ecclesia*) is presented as the bride of Christ, a wife, mistress (*matrona*, *domina*) and queen (*regina*) ruling throughout the world, while the community of heretics (*congregatio*) is a concubine and handmaid (*concubina*, *ancilla*) that has to be expelled with their sons who have no right to the inheritance. For Sy 3 the faith and good actions of all those who do not have the Church as mother have no value since they cannot have God as Father.<sup>168</sup> Sy 1 refers to the fact that a number of members of the community may have passed to the Arians' side but are welcome back by their mother Church, while *Iud* emphasises that those who pass to the Arians' side shall be judged as runaway slaves and be damned at the end of times, as it is not better to be a heretic than a pagan.<sup>169</sup> Sy 1—and in very similar terms *Gr* 2, *Fer*, *Iud* and Sy 3—particularly attacks the practice of rebaptism:

You scorn your mistress, you assail your true mother, in rebaptising the Catholic, you exsufflate (*exsufflas*) Christ. [...] Some you compel with force, in order to destroy them, on others you press money which results in their death. [...] But you, beloved, who have been nourished from the breasts of Holy Mother the Church in the beginning and have been weaned by her to solid food, remain dwelling in her.<sup>170</sup>

167 Sy 1, VI.4–5: “*Ascendat sponsus noster thalami sui lignum, ascendat sponsus noster thalami sui lectum. Dormiat moriendo, aperiatur eius latus, et ecclesia prodeat virgo: ut quomodo Eva facta est ex latere Adae dormientis, ita et ecclesia formetur ex latere Christi in cruce pendens. Percussum est enim eius latus, ut evangelium loquitur, et statim manavit sanguis et aqua, quae sunt ecclesiae gemina sacramenta*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 320); see as well *Cata* III–IV; *Fer* v; *Gr* 1, XVIII; *Iud* x; Sy 2, IV.27–28. On this interpretation in “*Quodvultdeus*”: Peper (2011), 211–214. In Augustine: Tromp, S., (1932), ‘*De Nativitate Ecclesiae ex corde Iesu in Cruce*’, *Gregorianum* 13, 489–527.

168 Sy 3, XIII.1: “*Nec habebit deum patrem, qui ecclesiam noluit habere matrem*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 363); *Fer* VI–VII; *Gr* 2, XIII.6 with similar content adds that the Arians cannot hold the Catholic faith corresponding to the Roman faith: “*Non crederis veram fidem tenere catholicae, quae fidem non doces esse servandam romanam*” (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 470). *Iud* XXII opposes his Church as bride and *domina* to the Arian Church as a widow, a step-mother and prostitute, quoting Jer 3, 3 (*turpis vidua; noverca; fornicaria; turpis ancilla*) (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 363).

169 Sy 1, XIII.12: “*Si quis eius vel disciplinam vel quamlibet admonitionem aspere tulit, et iratus abscessit, agnoscat matrem, redeat ad eam; libenter et haec suscipit quos requirit; gaudebit filium perditum fuisse conversum*”; *Iud* XX.1: “*Si quis ab ea discesserit atque haereticorum se errori tradiderit, iudicabitur ut fugitivus servus, non ut filius adoptivus; nec ad vitam aeternam resurget, sed potius ad damnationem*” and XX.3 (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 255 and 334).

170 Sy 1, XIII.6: “*Dominam calcas, veram matrem impugnas, Christum exsufflas, catholicum*

Candidates therefore receive a detailed explanation on the creed in the same fashion as in Augustine's sermons, with, however, a strong emphasis against Arians and the practice of rebaptism, which, as it is the case for Optatus' and Augustine's works against Donatists, is rejected also on the basis of the foreswearing of Christ (*exsufflare*). It is remarkable that this refers to the fact that Arians, as Donatists before them, may have repeated the catechumenate for Catholics that they wanted to rebaptise. These sermons show the significance of the catechumenate in polemical debates and the fact that the same arguments were used years later against new opponents in a new historical context.<sup>171</sup> The traditional African imagery of the Church as a mother well represents the significance of baptism as a new birth and serves to build clear boundaries and create cohesion amongst candidates as sons of the same mother. *Cant* also includes such a final warning to candidates against heretics in general and the risk of proselytism (*evangelizare*), but it does not point to Arians in particular.<sup>172</sup>

By contrast, the commentary on the Church at the end of Sy 2 only concentrates on the common theme of the Church spread throughout the world (*ubique diffusa*)—perhaps a hint of anti-Donatism or anti-Arianism—as a fertile and virgin mother giving birth to Christians, before drawing a full list of the different and befitting care provided by the Church to all its members of both sexes, be they infants (*parvuli*), children (*pueri*), adolescents (*adulescentes*), youth (*iuvenes*), old (*senes*) or advanced in age.<sup>173</sup> *Cata* also avoids polemics at the end of the sermon, similarly focusing on a list of exemplary characters.<sup>174</sup>

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*rebaptizas [...] alios potentia premis ut perdas, alios pecunia comparas quos occidas. [...] Vos autem, dilectissimi, qui ab initio uberibus sanctae matris ecclesiae nutriti, usque ad solidum cibum estis ab ea perducti, manete in ea*" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 334; Finn, ACW 60 (2004), 49–50 adapted). *Gr* 2, XII.6–7 has close words; *Fer* VI.24 lists the pernicious effects of Arian rebaptism, as do *Iud* XIX.6: "*Vos autem sacrilego ausu, quibus iam Christus dono spiritus sancti per baptismum et originalia et propria cuncta dimisit omnino peccata, in iam baptizatis exsufflatis christum, respuitis spiritum sanctum, et renatum non abluere, sed sordidare, non liberare, sed obligare, non vivificare, sed mortificare contenditis*" and Sy 3, XIII.5: "*O haeresis arriana, quid insultas, quid exsufflas, quid etiam ad tempus multa usurpas?*" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 255 and 363).

171 On the links between the Donatist and Arian controversies see Whelan (2014 and 2016).

172 *Cant* x.1: "*Vos autem, fidelia germina sanctae matris ecclesiae catholicae per universum mundum diffusae, fugite omnes haereses. Si quis aliud evangelizaverit nobis, anathema sit*" (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 392).

173 Sy 2, XII.7–10, esp. 7: "*Ideo sacramenti huius conclusio per ecclesiam terminatur, quia ipsa est mater fecunda, integra et casta, ubique diffusa, quae filios deo spiritualiter parit, quae sapientiam docet, quae adolescentes a luxuria atque impudicitia sua sancta castitate custodit*" etc. (Braun, CCL 60 (1976), 348).

174 *Cata* VI.

All sermons aimed, with different methods, to give a presentation and interpretation of the crucial episodes in sacred history, thus presenting both a set of beliefs and a summary outline of the key events that shaped the relationship between God and man. The conclusions on the Church summarise the immediate objective of the catechesis in the context of the initiation and the Lenten discipline: create cohesion, perseverance and a sense of belonging to the community both for candidates preparing for baptism and for the baptised, in a context of competition and potential conflict with rival Christian communities.<sup>175</sup>

#### 2.4 Conclusion

These sermons provide a remarkable opportunity to follow the initiation of candidates to baptism in late antique North Africa: it was a dramatic process, as individuals were humbled, had to state their radical commitment to a change of life in front of the whole community and learn an unknown text, the creed, to become part of the Christian community of the *fideles*. The enrolment to prepare for baptism, the exorcisms, the single ritual of renunciation and adhesion, the sermon that followed on the creed, the catecheses on a new life, on the Passion and on the hidden meaning of the rite of baptism, were all meant to leave a deep mark on the candidates. The significance of polemics in these sermons is a noteworthy feature, demonstrating the context of competition through preaching among religious communities in late antique Africa. It casts light on the fact that the period of preparation to baptism was meant to inculcate to candidates a sense of their exclusive religious identity and at the same time reinforce the boundaries of the whole community. It is worth noting that, as for Canon 3 at the council of Hippo, African sources mentioning rites of the catechumenate almost systematically do so in a context of religious rivalry. The rules, rites and explanations part of the initiation process were precisely developed to oppose other religious groups and to create a distinctive sense of belonging.

Comparing the sermons has also led to a refined understanding of their environment of composition and authorship, beyond their attribution to Quodvultdeus: while similar emphasis on broad themes related to the creed and particularly polemics against heretics are understandable, a common liturgical context—explanation on the creed—and language may explain why some phrases are repeated almost with the same words.<sup>176</sup> The liturgical quality

175 This is also well highlighted in the analysis of the catechesis provided by Vopřada (2017b; 2017c).

176 For instance: Sy 1, XIII.1: "*Sancta ecclesia in qua omnis huius sacramenti terminatur auctor-*

and the repetitive features of sermons, constitute a distinctive genre, making it difficult to argue for a common authorship on grounds of commonalities in language, while peculiar features highlighted in each sermon show the creativity within the genre and lead us to suspect that the sermons are the work of various preachers, perhaps at different times, in communities that shared theological and cultural references, often in common with Augustine. In the perspective of future research, only a careful comparison of these sermons with Augustine's *corpus* more broadly, particularly the exegesis, may lead to a better understanding of the milieu in which they were composed. Nevertheless, research on the central rite of renunciation and adhesion attested in these sermons has shed light on practices not described in Augustine and has shown that none of the sermons on the creed can be precisely situated within the baptismal preparation, although they must all have been preached in the final weeks preceding baptism. Our sources stem from a period when the liturgy was not systematically put in writing nor standardised but followed local practices.<sup>177</sup> The initiation of catechumens cannot be studied as a fixed process: rites are known through allusions to the lived experience that gave meaning to the catechesis.<sup>178</sup> Preachers, grounding their speech on a shared tradition, adapted the catechesis to fit their concerns and immediate circumstances. Religious polemics were essential in this process, as clerics had to adapt constantly their speech to new adversaries. Initiating new candidates, year after year, meant to constantly reinvent Christian belonging and its ritual performance.<sup>179</sup>

### 3 Late Antique Anonymous Sermons of Uncertain African Origin<sup>180</sup>

Beyond the set of sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, the creativity and variety of practices of initiation in Late Antiquity can be further demonstrated

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itas"; Sy 2, XII.7: "*Ideo sacramenti huius conclusio per ecclesiam terminatur*" and Sy 3, XIII.1: "*Propterea huius conclusio sacramenti per sanctam ecclesiam terminatur*" (Braun, *CCSL* 60 (1976), 333, 348 and 363). These passages are quoted by Franes (1920), 26 to suggest common authorship.

177 Vopřada (2020), 210 also concludes his study of the rites of renunciation and adhesion by stressing the diversity displayed in the evidence.

178 On the close connection between catechesis and liturgy see the insightful remarks of Triacca, A.M., (1979), 'Liturgia e catechesi nei padri: note metodologiche', *Salesianum* 41, 257–272.

179 On the art of catechesis see the insightful synthesis of Harmless (2014), 404–442.

180 This part provides a condensed and slightly reworked version of Pignot, M., 'The Catechumenate in Anonymous Sermons from the Late Antique West', in Bodin, A., Gerzaguet,



thanks to an exploration of other little-studied collections of sermons. Many anonymous, dubious or pseudo-epigraphic Latin sermons long attributed in particular to Augustine, John Chrysostom and Fulgentius of Ruspe, have much to offer on rites of initiation and catechesis implemented during the catechumenate. A few of them have been first mentioned in a recent comprehensive synthesis, but mostly in passing.<sup>181</sup> More research has been done on the creeds and therefore on sermons on the reception and teaching of the creed,<sup>182</sup> nevertheless, there still is no detailed study of such texts as sources for the catechumenate in Late Antiquity. Anonymous sermons have often been left out because of their lack of ascribed author, precise dating, and often critical editions. However, several sermons were certainly preached in the late antique West and may originate from Africa, as can be shown thanks to a close analysis of manuscripts, the biblical text used, and other relevant internal evidence. However, before they can be fully exploited on a large scale in historical research, special attention on methodological issues,<sup>183</sup> preliminary work on their manuscript transmission, their text and more generally studies of any available evidence for their context of composition are required.<sup>184</sup> The following study therefore constitutes only a first step of this long-term research goal: I here carry a preliminary exploration of a few striking examples in order to show that these sermons sharpen our picture of the catechumenate from better-known sources as a changing organisation.

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C., Pignot, M., (eds.), (2017), *Becoming Christian in the Late Antique West (3rd–6th Centuries)* (Leuven), *SP* 77, 11–32.

181 Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 473–474 and Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 559–560 both listing some sermons on the catechumenate discussed in this study. A particularly interesting fragment that could not be considered here is *PS-FU* s 78 = *CPL* 844 *sermo* 78 = *CPPM* 4870 (*Inc.*: “*Ecce qualiter de praesenti mundo*”), comparing the baptismal preparation to the ten plagues of Egypt.

182 See already Caspari (1869), 224–244 for an edition and study of two sermons on the creed of the Latin pseudo-Chrysostom sermons ‘*Universalis ecclesia gaudet*’ and ‘*Super fabricam totius ecclesiae*’. See more below, note 205. See also Kattenbusch (1897), 207–209. More recently Westra (2002), 450–452 and 453–456 with further editions of the same texts and bibliography.

183 A more comprehensive discussion in Pignot (2017).

184 This requires a collective research effort; a first step towards this goal has been the organisation of an international conference on anonymous sermons from the late antique West held in Namur on 16 May 2019, the proceedings of which will be published in the near future in the collection *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia* (see Pignot, M., (ed.), *Latin Anonymous Sermons in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (300–800)*, forthcoming).

### 3.1 *The Rites of traditio and redditio: Teaching and Learning Psalms*

Besides rare evidence of the distinction between *catechumeni* and *fideles* as two stages of progression (employing the imagery of agriculture recalling Augustine's writings and the sermon *Fer* discussed in the previous section),<sup>185</sup> and an anonymous pre-baptismal catechesis, probably preached to *competentes*, recently discovered and published by Dolbeau,<sup>186</sup> various anonymous sermons also provide valuable evidence for the process of learning and reciting the creed and the Lord's Prayer during the baptismal preparation, complementing the scarce evidence preserved in Augustine and the sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus. Several anonymous sermons refer both to the creed and the Lord's Prayer and suggest that the learning and memorisation of both texts may have been widespread in late antique Africa beyond Hippo. Thus, sermons of likely African origin include, for instance, two sermons on the creed in the Latin pseudo-Chrysostom known as the 'Morin collection',<sup>187</sup> and a pseudo-Fulgentius published by Morin and recently reconsidered as a perhaps authentic sermon of Fulgentius by Dolbeau.<sup>188</sup> Similarly, a number of anonymous sermons of probable African origin preached to candidates on the Lord's prayer have been preserved, in particular in the same Latin pseudo-Chrysostom collection, in the appendix of the Maurist edition of Augustine's sermons, and among anonymous sermons in the Wolfenbüttel collection discovered by Morin.<sup>189</sup> However, besides the creed and the Lord's Prayer, sermons

185 Pignot (2017) discusses in particular PS-AU s 157 = CPPM 943 (*Inc.*: "*Multa sunt et magna venerandae paschae mysteria*"). I have since become aware of another (fragmentary) copy of this rarely attested sermon: Nuremberg, *Stadtbibliothek*, C. 1. 85, f. 82<sup>v</sup> (s. xvi).

186 Dolbeau, F., (2004b), 'Une ancienne catéchèse latine, peut-être originaire d'Afrique', in Gain, B., Jay, P., Nauroy, G., (eds.), (2004), *Chartae caritatis. Études de patristique et d'antiquité tardive en hommage à Yves-Marie Duval* (Paris) 299–319, reprinted in Dolbeau (2005), 355–375 (text at 315–319 [370–375]).

187 See notes 182 and 205.

188 PS-FU s Mor = CPPM 4883 = CPL 846 (*Inc.*: "*Audite, dilectissimi qui desideratis carere iugum servitutis*"), edited by Morin, G., (1923), 'Deux sermons africains du 5e/6e s. avec un texte inédit du Symbole', *RBen* 35, 236–245, and again in Westra (2002), 441–447. Morin rejected the attribution to Fulgentius, but Lemarié's and Dolbeau's recent discoveries brought Dolbeau to conclude that the sermons may have been preached by Fulgentius: see Introduction note 66. Westra (2002), 318–328 suggests Africa as a likely place of origin, at the earliest in the fifth century. The sermon is attributed to Fulgentius in the early homiliary, Vienna, *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, Cod. 1616 dating from the end of the eighth century.

189 *Sermo* 28 (27) = JO-N 28 (*Inc.*: "*Dominica oratio ex pontificali doctrina electis ad fidem debetur*"); PS-AU s 65 = CPPM 850 (*Inc.*: "*Quoniam Domino subveniente atque gubernante*"), preserved in the Lyon collection of Augustine's sermons (see Verbraken (1976), 215–216); in the Wolfenbüttel collection, besides Augustine's S. 58 and 59a<sub>g</sub>, there are two sermons

also attest a further ritual, which is not explicitly mentioned in any text securely attributed to African writers: the teaching and learning of psalms before baptism. Two sermons in particular focus on Psalm 22 about the good shepherd. These sermons, which have not received the attention they deserve, provide rare evidence for a specific ritual of preparation.

### 3.1.1 A Dubious Augustinian Sermon

The first is Sermon 366 in the Maurist edition of Augustine's sermons,<sup>190</sup> listed as *dubius* (doubtful attribution).<sup>191</sup> The sermon is transmitted through the *De diversibus rebus* collection preserved in a manuscript from Clairvaux<sup>192</sup> derived from a compilation of earlier collections of Augustine's sermons, which exclusively contains (apparently except for this sermon) authentic sermons of Augustine arranged in two parts, the first containing sermons covering the Old testament, with particular emphasis on psalms.<sup>193</sup> In a recent study, Dolbeau identified another collection of sermons on psalms with several analogies to the *De diversis rebus* and suggested that both probably derive from an earlier source, containing authentic sermons of Augustine on psalms.<sup>194</sup> Thus, at first sight, the manuscript evidence seems to argue rather in favour of attributing

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on the Lord's Prayer, most probably of African origin, n. 18 and 19 (Morin (1917), 179–181 and 181–186): PS-AU s Gue 3 = CPL 370 *sermo iii* = CPPM 1974 (*Inc.*: “*Dominicum semen per manus linguae nostrae*”) and PS-AU s Gue 4 = QU tr 1 = CPL 370 *sermo iv* and 414 = CPPM 1975 and 6402 (*Inc.*: “*Videmus dilectissimi, vestram sanctam devotionem*”), the latter tentatively attributed to Quodvultdeus by Morin. Another example is the anonymous homily (transmitted under the name of John Chrysostom) and published by Bouhot (1980), 75–78 (*Inc.* “*Invocare Deum beneficium est De*”), probably as well of African origin. See Schnurr (1985), 235–276 for a description of the catechesis of PS-AU s Gue 4, the homily published by Bouhot, and JO-N 28. Moreover, there is a homily on the Lord's Prayer to candidates, now published under Chromatius' name, *Inc.* “*Dominus et Salvator noster Iesus Christus inter caetera*” (CHRO (or = CPL 219, Bulhart, V. et al., CCSL 9 (1957), 445–447): the attribution has been rejected by Bouhot (2003), 10 who suggests an African origin arguing that the rite only arrived in Aquileia in the ninth c. and its text is influenced by Tertullian and Cyprian (although these are two weak arguments). In early medieval sources for the pre-baptismal liturgy in Naples, the teaching of the Lord's Prayer is also listed, see below note 206.

190 AU s 366 = CPPM 733 (“*Psalmum vobis, dilectissimi, qui ad Christi baptismum properatis*”; PL 39 (1841), 1646–1650).

191 A summary of opinions in Verbraken (1976), 151.

192 Troyes, *Bibliothèque municipale*, 40, X (s. XII).

193 Verbraken (1976), 228–230.

194 Dolbeau, F., (2012), ‘Une collection méconnue de sermons sur les psaumes’, in Dupont, A., Partoens, G., Lamberigts, M., (eds.), (2012), *Tractatio scripturarum. Philological, Exegetical, Rhetorical and Theological Studies on Augustine's Sermons* (Turnhout), 9–39.

this sermon to Augustine. However, in the seventeenth century, the Maurists, on grounds of style, doubted its attribution to Augustine found in manuscripts and listed it among the dubious sermons.<sup>195</sup> Since then, there has been very little discussion about the attribution.<sup>196</sup> It is also possible that the uniqueness of the attested ritual may have inclined them to question the authenticity. The sermon was clearly addressed to candidates as they were preparing for baptism. They were asked to learn by heart Psalm 22 (*"Dominum regit me, et nihil me deerit"* etc.) and received an explanation on it, very much in the same fashion as the explanations of the creed and the Lord's prayer. They most probably recited it from memory at another occasion, which is not specified. The beginning of the sermon clearly points to the ritual: "To you, dearly beloved, who are hastening toward the baptism of Christ, we are handing over this psalm in the name of the Lord, to be learned by heart; so we must explain its inner meaning, with divine grace to enlighten us".<sup>197</sup> As is common in the case of sermons on the creed, particularly Augustine's, the preacher emphasises that the psalm contains a summary of what candidates need: "It's a psalm, you see, which in a special way contains the remedy for the fall of the human race, and simultaneously the discipline and the sacraments of holy Church".<sup>198</sup> The preacher follows the text of the psalm which he quotes and comments as appropriate. For instance, he compares the pastures in the psalm to the commandments of God, which candidates are learning, well summarising the process of conversion transforming candidates into *fideles*: "So then, once you are already enlightened, already converted and turned back to him, already a believer, already fattened on the divine pastures through the water of refreshment, you will say, *He has converted my soul* (Ps 22, 3)".<sup>199</sup>

195 PL 39 (1841), 1647 n. 2: "*Ipsum tamen dicendi genus fere persuasit falsam in manuscriptis esse inscriptionem sermonis, vixque dubitamus quin non sit Augustini*".

196 Verbraken (1976), 151 mentions Lambot's rejection of the attribution found in his personal files and the inclusion of this sermon in La Bonnardière, A.-M., (1967a), *Biblia Augustiniana. A. T. Le Deutéronome* (Paris), 66 (it should be noted that La Bonnardière (1960), 18 does not include the quotation of Jos 1, 5 in S. 366, 5); Gryson (2007), I, 254 (AU s 366, based on Frede, H., (1984), *Kirchenschriftsteller. Aktualisierungsheft 1984* (Freiburg), 36) states that authenticity is most doubtful but that the sermon seems of African origin.

197 (Augustine), S. 366, 1: "*Psalmum vobis, dilectissimi, qui ad christi baptismum properatis, in nomine domini tradimus memoriae collocandum; cuius necesse est, ut mysterium, illuminante divina gratia, exponamus*" (PL 39 (1841), 1646; Hill, WSA III/10 (1995), 288).

198 Ibid.: "*Hic enim psalmus specialiter reformationem lapsus humani generis, et sanctae ecclesiae disciplinam, simulque continet sacramenta*" (PL 39 (1841), 1646; Hill, WSA III/10 (1995), 288).

199 (Augustine), S. 366, 4: "*Iam ergo illuminatus, iam conversus, iam credens, iam divinis pas-*

It is difficult to situate the ceremony within the framework of the catechumenate. The tone of the sermon hints at the fact that candidates are close to baptism and the reception of the Eucharist, thus probably only a few days or weeks before Easter.<sup>200</sup> Hill, suggested that it was preached during a *red-ditio symboli*, assuming that the learning of the psalms immediately followed the recitation of the creed by candidates.<sup>201</sup> This assumption is based on the following passage: "This, dearly beloved, is the hope of your faith. You have approached the Lord to believe; make haste, and take pains by good behaviour to grasp what you have believed."<sup>202</sup> Indeed, the preacher speaks of believing (*credere*) and it may well refer to the recitation of the creed. However, he could mean in general terms that, during this process of preparation to baptism, they need both faith and good behaviour, a very common theme in pastoral texts. For instance, the *catechumeni*, long before enrolling and preparing for baptism, were already required to believe in God, as is often explained by Augustine.<sup>203</sup> It is not clear, therefore, when exactly this sermon was preached during the baptismal preparation.

### 3.1.2 Sermon 29, Latin Pseudo-Chrysostom "Morin Collection"

The second witness of this ritual of teaching and learning Psalm 22 before baptism is a sermon commenting on the same psalm found among the collection of Latin sermons wrongly ascribed to John Chrysostom, today known as the Pseudo-Chrysostom "Morin collection", since Morin was the first to study the collection as a whole.<sup>204</sup> Morin suggested in 1894 that the collection was composed in Late Antiquity as the work of a single preacher, and attributed it to the bishop John the Moderate of Naples living in the second third of the sixth century. Already in 1895, however, he revised his opinion and proposed to assign it to a bishop preaching in the fifth or sixth century, perhaps in Naples. Finally, in 1913, he suggested that it was the work of a disciple of Augustine, a

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*cuis per aquam refectionis satiatus dices: animam meam convertit*" (PL 39 (1841), 1648; Hill, WSA 111/10 (1995), 290).

200 For instance (Augustine), S. 366, 7: "*Cum vos ergo divina gratia, ad quam properatis, advexerit, cognoscetis mensam spiritualis convivii*" (PL 39 (1841), 1659).

201 Hill, WSA 111/10 (1995), 294, n. 1.

202 (Augustine), S. 366, 8: "*Accessistis ad dominum credere; festinate et operam date apprehendere per bonam conversationem quod credidistis*" (PL 39 (1841), 1650; Hill, WSA 111/10 (1995), 293 adapted).

203 See Chapter 2.

204 *Sermo* 30 (29) = JO-N 30 (*Inc.*: "*Circulo consecrato, anno revoluto, debitum vobis sermonem electis ad fidem decrevimus*"), PLS 4 (1967), 824–831.

bishop exiled from Africa in the fifth century, like Quodvultdeus, Gaudiosus or Priscus, preaching in a good-sized city.<sup>205</sup> These hypotheses were based on a link suggested by Morin between this sermon and early medieval evangeliaries representing the liturgy practised in Naples, in which readings were listed for a *traditio psalmorum* (explanation on psalms) on the third Sunday of Lent.<sup>206</sup> This certainly proves that the practice was more widespread than it may seem at first. Nevertheless, one should not easily conclude that because the ritual is attested in early medieval documents originating from Naples, the sermons were preached there. Somewhere else in Southern Italy is likewise plausible, as tentatively suggested by Westra in his analysis of the creed contained in one of the sermons of the collection—although no specific south-Italian creed type is available to compare it with.<sup>207</sup> Africa is a likely region of origin, as various scholars suggested examining the text.<sup>208</sup> Further arguments in favour of Africa

205 Morin, G., (1894), 'Étude sur une série de discours d'un évêque (de Naples?) du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RBen* 11, 385–402; Id., (1895), 'Un essai d'autocritique', *RBen* 12, 385–396, at 390–391; Id., (1913), *Études, textes, découvertes* (Maredsous), 37–38. There are thirty sermons, first edited amongst the works of John Chrysostom in a number of sixteenth-century editions and lastly reprinted on the basis of the Paris edition (Claude Chevallon, 1536, the first complete edition of the thirty sermons) by Bouhot, J.-P., as "Collectio Morin", *PLS* 4 (1967), 741–834 and wrongly listed under the name of the bishop John of Naples in *CPL* 915 and Gryson (2007), II, 592–593 (JO-N), following Morin (1894). The edition in *PLS* and the repertories wrongly count thirty-one homilies, dividing homily 22 in two parts, although most manuscripts transmit it as a single text (the second part of which is probably an interpolation to the original homily). For a summary on this collection with suggested corrections to *CPL*, see Leroy, F.J., (2004), 'Compléments et retouches à la 3<sup>e</sup> édition de la Clavis Patrum Latinorum. L'homilétique africaine masquée sous le Chrysostomus Latinus, Sévérien de Cérāmussa et la catéchèse donatiste de Vienne', *RHE* 99/2, 425–434, esp. 431. Only the two homilies on the creed have since been critically edited (see note 182), corresponding to JO-N 27 and 29.

206 Gamber, K., (1968a), *Codices liturgici latini antiquiores*, 2nd edition (Freiburg), nr. 405 and 406: respectively an evangeliary copied at Lindisfarne after 700 using a Neapolitan archetype (London, *British Library*, Cotton MS Nero D. IV = *CLA* 11, 187) and a lectionary from eighth-century Northumbria, maybe a copy of the former (Codex Regius, London, *British Library*, Royal MS B VII = *CLA* 11, 213). On both, see Morin, G., (1891), 'La liturgie de Naples au temps de Saint Grégoire', *RBen* 8 (1891), 481–493 and 529–537; Gamber, K., (1962), 'Die kampanische Lektionsordnung', *SEJG* 13, 326–352. In relation to the sermons here discussed: Wiegand (1899), 169–177 esp. 171–172; Dondeyne (1932), 19–21.

207 Westra (2002), 338–342, thus following Kattenbusch (1894), 107–109 who also mentions Italy as a possibility. However, Westra also notes that some wordings are only found in the general formulation from Africa.

208 Caspari (1869), 235–237 already preferred Africa, as did Vaccari, A., (1948), 'La Bibbia nell'ambiente di S. Benedetto', *Biblica* 29, 321–344. See also on the anonymous author Lambert, M., (1968), *Une collection homilétique du sixième siècle (Italie du sud). Contribu-*

based on external evidence have been put forward by Bouhot followed by Dolbeau on the grounds that its attribution to John Chrysostom better fits African habits as evidenced from the Wilmarth collection of pseudo-Chrysostom sermons, which is linked to the manuscript transmission of the Morin collection.<sup>209</sup> Similarly, although scholars have acknowledged its late antique origin and unity of authorship, there is still great uncertainty about the precise dating of the Morin collection, with hypotheses ranging from the mid-fifth to the late sixth century.<sup>210</sup>

In Sermon 30 of the collection—more precisely 29 when counting Sermons 22 and 23 as a single text—the preacher comments on Psalm 22 and explains that he is about to hand it over to the elects (*electi*), here clearly referring to candidates preparing for baptism and using a term diverging from Augustine's *competentes*. He further notes that they have to learn it by heart, repeat it afterwards and put it into practice through good works.<sup>211</sup> As in Sermon 366, the link is made between doing good works and learning texts by heart. Similarly, various passages of Psalm 22 are quoted and explained with the help of Old Testament extracts (mostly Genesis, Psalms and prophets) and Paul and the Gospels. In general, the preacher is particularly attentive to repeat the words of the psalm, regularly first quoting then explaining each verse, finally repeating the whole verse, probably to help memorisation. However, at the end, the preacher concludes by saying that those who are not ready to recite and memorise Psalm 22 because of its length, can learn the much shorter Psalm 116

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tion à l'étude de l'Histoire de la Catéchèse d'Adultes (Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain, Mémoire présenté pour l'obtention du grade de Licencié en Sciences Catéchétiques), 16–24.

209 Bouhot, J.-P., (1970), 'La collection homilétique pseudo-chrysostomienne découverte par Dom Morin', *REAug* 16, 139–146, at 144–146; Id., 'Une ancienne homélie catéchétique pour la tradition de l'oraison dominicale', *Augustinianum* 20 (1980), 69–78, n. 22; Dolbeau (2012), 26–28. The reprint of the 'Morin collection' by J.P. Bouhot, *PLS* 4 (1967), 654 gives a list of the most important manuscripts. The collection was widespread: I have so far examined 23 manuscripts containing the full collection, which is attributed to "Johannes Chrysostomus", or simply "Iohannes", but there are certainly more. The oldest are Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Lat. 13347 (s. IX); Angers, *Bibliothèque municipale*, 280 (s. XI); Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Lat. 9521 (s. XI); Brussels, *Royal Library of Belgium*, 5463–5467 (s. XI). The archetype is clearly older as suggested by the study of Dolbeau (2012), 26–27.

210 Lastly, Dolbeau (2012), 27 summarising earlier hypotheses, agrees on a late antique origin.

211 *Sermo* 30 (29): "Ergo de ista charitate compellit nos veritas, ut psalmum vobis electis, et ad fidem concurrentibus exponamus. Hos versiculos psalmi memoria tenete, ore reddite, operibus implete. Non sufficit reddere deo, nisi et cor mundum applicare deo" (*PLS* (1967), 824).

instead. He then briefly comments on this other psalm, before concluding with a final exhortation urging his hearers to memorise the psalms.<sup>212</sup> Thus, again, this sermon implies that there was a solemn recitation of psalms which cannot be clearly situated.

### 3.2 *Psalms and the Catechumenate in the West*

These two sermons show that a parallel tradition of teaching, memorising and reciting psalms during initiation existed in Late Antiquity. In both cases, from internal evidence alone, it is not possible to date the rites to specific liturgical occasions. Moreover, as the two sermons are unlikely to have been preached by the same author, and although the practice is also clearly attested in liturgical sources from Naples, there is no reason to conclude, following Dondeyne and Quasten, that they both originate from Naples, refer to Neapolitan practice, and should have been taught and recited according to the local calendar.<sup>213</sup> On the contrary, the practice may have been followed elsewhere too. Indeed, Quasten and others have highlighted that Psalm 22 was very often interpreted as a psalm for baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist, because of its reference to the good shepherd, and in particular to the dressing of a divine table and the anointment with oil (Ps 22, 5). While no sermon attributed to Augustine—except the dubious 366—is preached on psalms to candidates, in his explanation of Psalm 22, Augustine clearly connects it to baptism and hints in his commentary at two stages of ritual progression distinguishing the candidates from the baptised Christians.<sup>214</sup> Thus, the psalm was probably chanted at some point during the initiation, in a number of Eastern and Western late antique

212 Ibid.: “*Ecce in quantum ipse praestitit, non quantum debuimus, sed quantum potuimus ipso ministrante et donante expositum psalmum auribus vestris repraesentavimus. [...] Tene te traditum vobis psalmum, ut cum tenueritis, lingua reddideritis, vita, vocibus, et moribus, mereamini audire: Intrate in gaudium domini vestri (Mt 25, 21), Amen*” (PLS 4 (1967), 830–831).

213 Dondeyne (1932), 19–21; Quasten, J., (1939a), ‘Das Bild des Guten Hirten in den altchristlichen Baptisterien und in den Tauf liturgien des Ostens und Westens’, in Klauser, Th., (ed.), (1939), *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums. Franz Joseph Dölger zum sechzigsten Geburtstage dargeboten von Freunden* (Münster), 220–244, at 238. Recently: Gavrilyuk (2007), 308–309.

214 Augustine, *In Ps. 22, 1–2*: “*Ecclesia loquitur christo dominus pascit me, et nihil me deerit, dominus Iesus pastor meus est, et nihil mihi deerit. In loco pascuae ibi me collocavit. In loco pascuae incipientis a fide me perducens, ibi me nutriendum collocavit. Super aquam refectionis educavit me. Super aquam baptismi, quo reficiuntur qui integritatem viresque amiserant, educavit me*” (Weidmann, CSEL 93/1A (2003), 333). See Dulaey, M., BA 57/B (2009), n. c. 14 “Le débutant et le progressant dans le Psaume 22”, 324–325 (with references). Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum* 22, 1–3 also connects it to baptism.



communities: among the abundant literary and archaeological evidence, the psalm is notably mentioned in Eusebius of Caesarea (*Demonstratio evangelica* 1, 10), the catecheses of Cyril/John of Jerusalem (*Catecheses* 1, 6 and *Mystagogiae* 4,7) and Ambrose of Milan (*De mysteriis* VIII, 43 and *De sacramentis* v, 3,13, the latter of doubtful authenticity), and on inscriptions in baptisteries.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, Quasten, followed by Oppenheim, Daniélou and Fischer, already related all this evidence to the two sermons here discussed to argue that it was an essential psalm, part of the baptismal initiation.<sup>216</sup>

Therefore, instead of concluding with Morin, followed by Quasten, that it was a local practice, it is more plausible that these sermons are rare witnesses of a more widespread use of psalms in pre-baptismal catechesis, for which no direct evidence has been preserved in texts of secured authorship. It is worth reflecting on the fact that, as in the case of the Lord's Prayer, there may have been differences in the way initiation was organised, the psalms being taught either before or after baptism.<sup>217</sup> Further clues can be seen in the use of other psalms in a baptismal context in sources from the fifth- and sixth-century West: the *Regula Magistri* contains commentaries both on the Lord's Prayer and two psalms (Ps 14 and Ps 33, 12–16) in a way similar to the anonymous sermon discussed above.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, these two psalms are both linked to baptismal preparation in Jerome and late antique Italian sources,<sup>219</sup> further pointing to the widespread use of a number of psalms for initiation in Christian communities

215 See Quasten, J., (1934), 'Der Psalm vom Guten Hirten in altchristlicher Kultmystik und Taufliturgie', *Liturgisches Leben* 1/3, 132–141; Quasten (1939a); Quasten, J., (1939b), 'The Waters of Refreshment', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 1/4, 325–332 Daniélou, J., (1950), 'Le psaume XXII et l'initiation chrétienne', *LMD* 23, 54–69, Daniélou, J., (1951), *Bible et liturgie: la théologie biblique des sacrements et des fêtes d'après les Pères de l'Eglise* (Paris), 240–258; recently, see the summary in Jensen, R.M., (2012b), *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids MI), 75–78.

216 Quasten (1934), 139–141; Oppenheim, Ph., (1935), 'Christi persona et opus secundum textus liturgicae sacrae', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 49, 367–383, at 377–379; Quasten (1939a), 236–238; Quasten (1939b), 331–332; Daniélou (1951), 243–244; Fischer, B., (1992), *Redemptionis mysterium. Studien zur Osterfeier und zur christlichen Initiation* (Paderborn-Munich-Vienna-Zurich), 138.

217 This is noted in Daniélou (1951), 242–243.

218 *Regula Magistri*, Vogüé, A. de, SC 105 (1964), 316–320 (Ths).

219 The following were already identified by de Vogüé, A. de, *ibid.* 318 n. 8 and 321 n. 18: Ps 14 commented in Jerome, *Tractatus de psalmo XIII* "in quadragesima ad eos qui ad baptismum accedunt"; Ps 33, 12 chanted to candidates when they receive catechesis before baptism according to Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 62, 1 (on the creed); Cassiodorus, *Expositio psal-morum* 41 refers to this verse being chanted when candidates learn the *fidei rudimenta*. This psalm is also part of the ritual of *apertio aurium* during Lent according to the *Ordo romanus* XI, 42.

and highlighting that there may have been some room for choice of individual psalms to be taught to candidates.<sup>220</sup>

It is possible that these anonymous sermons teaching psalms were preached in Africa, however it remains difficult to precisely date and localise them before more extensive studies are carried on their manuscript transmission, biblical text and parallels with other late antique evidence. The attribution of Sermon 366 to Augustine remains doubtful, but it is possible that it was composed by an African preacher influenced by, and perhaps close to, Augustine. Beyond the issue of the attribution, the alternative practice attested in this sermon puts Augustine's evidence in a broader context, showing that there were alternative ritual practices, beyond the teaching of the creed and the Lord's Prayer, perhaps in Augustine's own community too. The few sermons discussed here are only a portion of those that are available for study. Their significance, however, is already apparent: they corroborate practices attested in well-known evidence and securely attributed sermons, but they also make us reconsider evidence left unnoticed, sometimes challenging our assumptions. Thus, the sermons on psalms demonstrate that an alternative and complementary teaching of psalms to candidates to baptism was organised in a number of communities, although only two sermons preached on that occasion seem to have been preserved in the late antique West. This study suggests that there was a wide range of rites, teaching techniques and contents imparted to catechumens, depending on the choices of local clerics. The extant evidence only represents a small portion of this variety. The exploration of these neglected sermons restores some of the richness of the initiation practices in late antique Christianity.

#### 4 Conclusion

African sources, despite their scarcity, provide essential evidence to complement what is known about the catechumenate from Augustine. A comparison of the material leads to a better understanding of how initiation was practised and conceptualised in late antique Africa. The third canon of the council of Hippo, the only legal source on the catechumenate preserved from the period, demonstrates that Augustine's attempts to draw new norms for the catechumenate fit within the efforts of African bishops more generally in the late fourth century to draw clear differences between catechumens and baptised

220 More broadly on psalms and Christian initiation: Rose (1966) and Rose, A., (1967), 'Les psaumes de l'initiation chrétienne', *QL* 48 (1967), 111–120.

at a time when Donatists and Catholics fought over new recruits. It is possible that such efforts for setting standards remained limited over the period, although the paucity of the evidence prevents arguments from silence to be effective and the tense religious context suggests that legislation on initiation may have been a recurrent concern. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, apart from corroborating some practices of initiation, as the giving of names at the enrolment for baptism, exorcisms and the teaching and memorisation of the creed, also bear evidence of a prominent rite of renunciation and profession of faith that has no parallel description in Augustine. A close analysis of the evidence suggested that the sermons, which share very similar language features and contexts of preaching, also bear striking differences and were probably preached by a number of different clerics. The analysis demonstrates the changing nature of the rites and the catechesis that resulted from a constantly evolving context of religious controversy. Augustine is put in a wider landscape of African traditions where the catechumenate was crucial for the development of religious belonging in opposition to rival groups. The study of anonymous sermons further shows the extent of diversity and adaptation of the catechesis, despite a shared culture and common structures of initiation. This chapter therefore reinforces the conclusions drawn for Augustine: our sources for the catechumenate are fragments about little-known practices reflecting the choices of clerics with specific agendas in a context of fierce religious disputes. The written remains of these traditions are no standard descriptions of a fixed and institutionalised organisation but snapshots of practices and ideas that varied across time and regions, even on the local level. As doctrinal debates long continued to influence the catechumenate, particularly in the aftermath of the condemnation of Pelagianism, these variegated African traditions became an essential source of inspiration for clerics in Africa and in Italy, especially at the turn of the sixth century when renewed attempts were made to draw normative views on initiation.

## From Carthage to Rome: Debating the Catechumenate in the Sixth-Century West

At the turn of the sixth century, the catechumenate remained the essential process through which individuals were integrated into Christian communities. The creation of a sense of belonging was essential in a context of renewed polemics and divisions amongst Churches. Ritual practices were still organised locally, both for infants and adults, while the growing importance of the Christian written tradition started to exert a decisive influence on debates about the catechumenate and baptism. Two letters, exchanged between Ferrandus of Carthage and Fulgentius of Ruspe in the early sixth century, address the issue of the validity of emergency baptism and the necessity of the catechumenate in the case of a candidate who had undergone the full baptismal preparation but was unconscious at the time of baptism. These letters are the last available sources to study the catechumenate in Africa during Late Antiquity. In the first part of this chapter, I explore these letters to demonstrate that they are attempts at setting clear rules on the necessity and validity of the catechumenate through theological arguments in a polemical context, on the basis of earlier African sources. In the second part, I put this exchange in a broader context by highlighting that a similar process was at work in early sixth-century Rome. In the letter of John the deacon to Senarius, African ideas, particularly Augustine's, were employed to draw similar coherent and normative views on how initiation should be performed and understood, again in a context of anti-Pelagian and anti-Arian polemics.

These two letter exchanges are part of the same trend towards the development of authoritative syntheses on the catechumenate by leading clerics of the time. They not only share the same topic—baptismal liturgy and theology—the same medium—letters—and the same format—questions and answers—but also originate from African and Italian milieus that were closely linked to each other and were deeply influenced by Augustine and other fourth- and fifth-century sources like canon law: Ferrandus and Fulgentius, who is commonly described as the *Augustinus breviatus* (“Augustine summarised”) for the extent to which Augustine impregnated his work, made extensive use of such writings of the past and also exchanged letters with leading Italian figures for the reception of Augustine, in particular Eugippius of Lucullanum.<sup>1</sup>

1 For Augustine's influence on Fulgentius, see Folliet, G., (1989), ‘Fulgence de Ruspe témoin

At the same time, in Ostrogothic Italy, Boethius, the deacon John and other aristocrats displayed a similarly deep interest in Augustine and other writings of their predecessors. Earlier Christian sources became essential for the refutation of opponents and for justifying the practices of the catechumenate for both adults and infants. Drawing on this written tradition as a source of inspiration and authority, clerics developed unprecedented normative views on the catechumenate at a crucial time for the development of liturgy.

A detailed analysis and comparison of both letter exchanges, highlighting their common concerns but also subtle differences, opens up new perspectives on initiation, religious debate and the inheritance of ritual performances and written traditions at the end of Antiquity.<sup>2</sup> The contextualisation of these sources considerably nuances the conclusions drawn by scholars on the supposed shift towards a “medieval” understanding of initiation in this period. Against the traditional reading of John’s letter as evidence for the progressive ritualisation of the catechumenate at the dawn of the Middle Ages and the shrinking of initiation in favour of infant baptism, I aim to show that its focus on rituals is part of the traditional use of liturgical arguments in polemical controversies.<sup>3</sup> John started from the authority of liturgical performance to justify the necessity of the catechumenate in the footsteps of Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine and pope Gelasius I (492–496). Thus, the letter exchanges embody the continuity of the African tradition: as for their predecessors, whom we have encountered in previous chapters, the initiation of catechumens in the sixth century still constituted a major stake in doctrinal polemics, requiring clerics to draw clear lines between communities and their members. At the same time, there was still no standard organisation of the catechumenate during this

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privilegié de l’influence d’Augustin en Sardaigne’, in Mastino, A., (ed.), (1989), *L’Africa romana: Atti del VI Convegno di studio, Sassari 16–18 dicembre 1988*, 2 volumes (Sassari), II, 561–569; Grossi, V., (2010), ‘Note sull’agostinismo di Fulgenzio di Ruspe (462–527)’, in Piras, A., (2010), *Lingua et ingenium: studi su Fulgenzio di Ruspe e il suo contesto* (Ortacesus), 71–103. On Fulgentius’ originality: Micaelli, C., (2013), ‘“Augustinus non breuiatus”: riflessioni su alcuni aspetti di originalità in Fulgenzio di Ruspe’, in Piras, A., Saba, G.F., (eds.), (2013), *‘Gregi Christi ministrantes’: studi di letteratura antica in onore di Pietro Meloni* (Cagliari), 187–206. Our study of his letter exchange with Ferrandus similarly helps both assessing the significance of Augustine’s influence and peculiar features of Fulgentius’ thinking on initiation.

2 To my knowledge, Wiegand (1899), 143–145 is the only scholar who briefly compared the two exchanges: while rightly remarking that the letters attempt to define normative practices, Wiegand also aimed at demonstrating the decline and lack of interest in the catechumenate as a process of teaching and conversion and its reduction to a series of rites. Here, I argue for the opposite thesis.

3 For references to the secondary literature on this supposed ritualisation see note 69.

period: the letters are new detailed attempts to set rules on the catechuminate and synthesise diverse practices and ideas.

## 1 The Debate between Ferrandus and Fulgentius on the Validity of Emergency Baptism

### 1.1 *The Context of the Exchange*

Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe in Byzacena, is the best known African writer of the Vandal period. His life coincides with the peak and the end of the Vandal kingdom, from the late fifth century to the 530s. Most evidence on his life and the period comes from the *Vita Fulgentii* written soon after his death probably around 534. The traditional attribution of the *Vita* to the deacon Ferrandus is highly doubtful: it may only be said that the author was a close contemporary, who spent most of his life close to Fulgentius.<sup>4</sup> The life contains few chronological markers to reconstruct Fulgentius' life.<sup>5</sup> His paternal grandfather, Gordianus, a senator, was amongst those who fled to Italy after the Vandal conquest of Carthage in 439 under Genseric, while his father resettled in Thelepte in Byzacena where the family received properties back from the king and where Fulgentius was born in 468.<sup>6</sup> The *Vita* describes how Fulgentius, after pursuing a secular career as a *procurator* (tax collector), decided to convert to ascetic life upon reflecting on Augustine's *Enarratio* 36, and joined, perhaps around

- 4 The life is the basis for our knowledge of Fulgentius' life and thus for the summary here provided. The authorship, accepted by Lapeyre, G.-G., (1929), *Saint Fulgence de Ruspe* (Paris), LIV–LXIII has been rejected by Isola, A., (1986), 'Sulla paternità della Vita Fulgentii', *VetChr* 23, 63–71 reprinted in Id., (2011), *Lente pertexere telam. Saggi di letteratura cristiana tardoantica* (Spoleto), 89–96. Recently, in the introduction to the new critical edition of the *Vita* (Isola, A., *CCSL* 91F (2016), 7–25), Isola suggests that the monk Redemptus, who left for Sicily with Fulgentius around 499, may be the author, although his argument does not seem wholly convincing. It is certain, at least, that the author of the *Vita* was influenced by Augustine's writings. On Fulgentius's life, here only briefly sketched, see more in: Jourjon, M., (1964), 'Fulgence de Ruspe', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique* 5, fasc. 37–38, 1612–1615; Langlois, P., (1972), 'Fulgentius', *RAC* 8, 632–661 (esp. 640–661); Schneider, H., (1999), 'Fulgentius', *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, 2nd edition (Freiburg), 241–244; Langlois, P., (2001), 'Africa II (literaturgeschichtlich)', *RAC Supplement-Band* 1, 134–228, at 205–209; Simonetti, M., (2014), 'Fulgentius of Ruspe', in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* (Downers Grove IL), II, 73–74. A good and recent collection of articles including a detailed bibliography: Piras (2010).
- 5 See 'Fulgentius 2', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 507–513; my summary follows the chronology established by Modéran. See, with a discussion of earlier hypotheses: Modéran, Y., (1993), 'La chronologie de la Vie de saint Fulgence et ses incidences sur l'histoire de l'Afrique vandale', *MEFRA* 105/1, 135–188, esp. 136–162.
- 6 *Vita Fulgentii* 1.

493, the bishop Faustus' monastery.<sup>7</sup> Despite remarkable differences, highlighted by Simonetti, Courcelle has noted the influence of Augustine's *Confessiones* on the writer of the *Vita Fulgentii* and the description that he gives of Fulgentius' conversion to monasticism.<sup>8</sup> From the 490s to the early 500s, Fulgentius visited monastic communities in Africa and Italy, before founding his own monasteries in Africa to seek more isolation. He was then recalled by his superior Faustus who ordained him before he was made bishop of Ruspe probably in 508.<sup>9</sup> Soon after he was exiled with other clerics to Sardinia on the orders of the Vandal king Thrasamund (496–523), where he founded monasteries, developing close ties with the Italian coast and writing works, which are now lost.<sup>10</sup> After spending most of his life in Sardinia, except a temporary stay in Carthage to take part in doctrinal debates, he finally returned to Africa after Thrasamund's death in 523. Still longing for the ascetic life in the desert, he nevertheless kept his position as bishop of Ruspe until his death at sixty-five, in 533.<sup>11</sup>

Fulgentius wrote a number of treatises which mostly consist in theological expositions of the Christian faith, particularly focusing on Christology in the context of disputes against Arians. The unlikely identification with Fulgentius the mythographer, contemporary author of a number of works on mythology, philosophy and history has been in doubt for centuries.<sup>12</sup> The dated works now preserved attributed to the bishop of Ruspe were probably mostly written during his second exile and when he returned to Africa.<sup>13</sup> Apart from these works, Fulgentius certainly preached regularly: as Augustine before him, he was invited to preach by the bishop of Carthage Bonifatius.<sup>14</sup> He was still known as a great preacher by Isidore and at least eight extant sermons are today attrib-

7 *Vita Fulgentii* 2–4. On Faustus see the probable identification with 'Faustus 6', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 398.

8 Simonetti, M., (1982), 'Note sulla Vita Fulgentii', *AB* 100, 277–289 notes that it is the only other African biography preserved after Possidius' *Vita Augustini* but that it does only contain few references to Augustine. However, see Courcelle, P., (1958), 'Trois récits de conversion au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans la lignée des Confessions de saint Augustin', *HJ* 77 (1958), 451–458, at 453–456 and Id., (1963), *Les Confessions de saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris), 221–224.

9 *Vita Fulgentii* 5–16.

10 *Vita Fulgentii* 17–19.

11 *Vita Fulgentii* 20–28. On the return to the desert, see Leyser, C., (2006), 'The Uses of the Desert in the Sixth-Century West', *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, 113–134.

12 See a recent case against it in Hays, G., (2003), 'The Date and Identity of the Mythographer Fulgentius', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 13, 163–252.

13 See dating hypotheses in Lapeyre (1929), 327–330; Langlois (1972), 643–652; 'Fulgentius 1', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 512; Schneider (1999), 241–244.

14 *Vita Fulgentii* 27; 'Bonifatius 26', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 159–161.

uted to him—undoubtedly a small fraction of those he preached.<sup>15</sup> Finally, he also maintained a close correspondence—nineteen letters are preserved—with African and Italian aristocrats and clerics, notably the deacon Ferrandus of Carthage, the aristocrat Proba and the monk Eugippius of Lucullanum near Naples, who wrote the first anthology of Augustine's works addressed to the same Proba, and with whom he exchanged books.<sup>16</sup>

Ferrandus is similarly an important source for this period, but his life is very little known, particularly if one does not consider him as the author of the *Vita Fulgentii*.<sup>17</sup> Ferrandus was deacon of Carthage and is known as the compiler of the widespread *Breviarium canonum*, the first preserved large-scale African collection of canons, and for his correspondence with Fulgentius and other clerics—twelve letters are extant.<sup>18</sup> He died perhaps around 545–546, certainly before April 548.<sup>19</sup> After Fulgentius' death, he reluctantly succeeded him as the African expert on matters of Christian teaching and theology, responding for instance to queries sent to him by Eugippius on the request of a Gothic *comes*, and completing an unfinished letter of Fulgentius to the *dux illustris* Reginus, on the question of the corruptibility of Jesus' body and on the conciliation of military and religious life.<sup>20</sup>

## 1.2 The Letter Exchange

In this relatively abundant African *corpus*, two letters exchanged between Ferrandus and Fulgentius—*Ep.* 11 and 12 in Fulgentius' collection—offer rare

15 Isidore, *De viris illustribus* 27. For preserved sermons see Langlois (1972), 650–651 and Introduction note 66.

16 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 5, 12. For more details: Stevens, S.T., (1982), 'The Circle of Bishop Fulgentius', *Traditio* 38, 327–341; Régerat, Ph., (2000), 'Eugippe et l'Église d'Afrique', in *Romanité et cité chrétienne: permanences et mutations, intégration et exclusion du 1<sup>er</sup> au 7<sup>me</sup> siècle. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Yvette Duval* (Paris), 263–272; Graham, S.R., (2005), *The Dissemination of North African Christian and Intellectual Culture in Late Antiquity*, PhD dissertation (Los Angeles), 39–46.

17 See note 4.

18 See Gryson (2007), 1, 486–487, *CPL* 848 and our bibliography for editions. On these letters: Régerat (2000), 269–272. On *Ep.* 3 and 5: Simonetti, M., (1981), 'Ferrando di Cartagine nella controversia teopaschita', in *Fides sacramenti, sacramentum fidei. Studies in Honour of P. Smulders* (Assen), 219–231. For a preliminary study of the letters towards a new critical edition: Di Pilla, A., (2010), 'Le epistole di Ferrando di Cartagine: materiali per una nuova edizione', in Piras (2010), 29–70. On Ferrandus and his writings see Lapeyre, G.-G., (1932), *L'ancienne Église de Carthage. Études et documents*, 2e série, 2 volumes (Paris), 11, 153–172.

19 See 'Ferrandus', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 446–450.

20 Ferrandus, *Ep.* 7, 2: "Et ideo [...] *Fulgentium pontificem Ruspensi Ecclesiae interrogasti* [...]. *Modo autem quia semipleni libelli imperfecta dictatio, nihil huic tuae interrogationi conoscitur respondisse*" (*PL* 67 (1848), 939). See 'Reginus 3', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 958.



evidence on the whole process of the catechumenate and baptismal preparation in Africa during the Vandal period. Although several studies have been written on Fulgentius, most focus on the *Vita* and theological works, particularly the Christological controversies in relation to the Arians and the debates against the so-called “semi-Pelagians”. Except for a short synthesis on Fulgentius’ texts on baptism,<sup>21</sup> the letter exchange has only been briefly noted in general surveys of the catechumenate and has never been fully translated into English.<sup>22</sup> It deserves closer study however, as a valuable source bearing interesting echoes of practices and ideas described in African canons and Augustine’s and other Africans’ sermons and works. It also provides a parallel to similar, but much more studied discussions on the catechumenate in the famous Roman sixth-century letter of John the deacon to Senarius.

The letters exchanged perhaps belong to the last years of Fulgentius’ life in Africa, between 523 and his death.<sup>23</sup> Two exchanges between Ferrandus and Fulgentius are preserved: each time, Ferrandus asked questions and Fulgentius replied.<sup>24</sup> These questions focus mostly on theological problems: in *Ep.* 11 Ferrandus wrote about the validity of emergency baptism and on the necessity of the Eucharist; in *Ep.* 13, he wrote about the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ incarnated, the soul of Christ, the shared reign of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and the presence of two chalices in the last supper according to Luke. These letters show Fulgentius’ influence in aristocratic and clerical circles: they are learned exchanges in which the correspondent requests detailed explanations from an expert, in a fashion that was widespread in Late Antiquity and clearly noticeable for instance in Augustine’s correspondence.<sup>25</sup> Such exchanges are more than learned discussions, however: in the context of polemical controversies, the *Vita Fulgentii* describes Fulgentius as the defender of the “Catholic” faith against the Arians.<sup>26</sup>

21 Gavigan, J.J., (1947), ‘Fulgentius of Ruspe on Baptism’, *Traditio* 5, 313–322. Bavaud, G., (1996), ‘Le laïc peut-il célébrer l’eucharistie? (Tertullien, *De exhortatione castitatis* 7, 3)’, *REAug* 42, 213–222, at 220–221 includes a discussion on the Eucharist from a section of Fulgentius’ *Ep.* 12.

22 For instance: Bingham (1840), 277, 283–284, 302, 313, 477–485; Mayer (1868), 108; Weiss (1886), 142; Kraus (1886), 147–152; Wiegand (1899), 143–144; Bareille (1910), 1889; Leclercq (1925), 2567; Dondeyne (1932), 17; Metzger-Drews-Brakmann (2004), 560; Gavriljuk (2007), 337–338. Not mentioned in Saxer (1988), Johnson (2007) and Ferguson (2009).

23 Lapeyre (1929), 330; Isola, A., *Fulgenzio di Ruspe, Le lettere* (Rome), 223–226. Both studies however do not provide arguments for the dating.

24 Fulgentius *Ep.* 11–14.

25 See Stevens (1982) for a discussion of this aspect with parallels from Gaul.

26 *Vita Fulgentii* 20.

Although Fulgentius' reply is specifically addressed to Ferrandus and thus falls within the category of "personal letters" as defined by Stevens, it is clear that the answers were meant for a wider public since they addressed questions asked by Ferrandus on behalf of the wider community.<sup>27</sup> The main events of Fulgentius' life that have been outlined above, particularly his position of authority as a leading monk and bishop, his knowledge of Augustine's works and his prominent role in controversies against Arians make clear why he was called as an expert to give his views on the catechumenate and why he displayed a strongly polemical tone in his letters.

The queries about initiation and baptism also specifically recall Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* written in reply to Deogratias, another deacon of Carthage who asked about the instruction of catechumens. It is remarkable to see a similar procedure at work more than a century later: clerics of Carthage in charge of teaching catechumens request explanations from experts, Augustine and Fulgentius. Ferrandus perhaps consciously perpetuated and mirrored this tradition, asking Fulgentius, who then enjoyed wide recognition after his return from exile, for a quick informative answer to questions that he thought were "useful to many".<sup>28</sup> Thus, Ferrandus expected authoritative statements from Fulgentius that could be used in African Christian communities for the development of standard views on initiation and for the refutation of opponents, as it was the case at Augustine's time. Despite the amount of written material left by Augustine on initiation, notably his polemical treatises, letters and sermons (which may also not have been fully available to these communities), the interpretation of Fulgentius, who knew Augustine's work well and who had a position of authority, was essential and complementary to earlier tradition.<sup>29</sup> Ferrandus' letter about baptism, however, also develops a peculiar approach: in the prologue, comparing himself to a beggar unable to obtain nourishment from his own study of Scripture because of his many occupations, Ferrandus describes Fulgentius not only as an expert but as a monk who has left all his possessions to gain a new treasure—with echoes of Mt 13, 46–52 on the parable of the pearl and treasures—implying that contrary to him, Fulgentius, dedicated

27 Stevens (1982), 329–330 who acknowledges this point.

28 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4: "*Simul ad utraque respondere dignatus, quae praesumptione caritatis interroganda credimus, et quae multis utilissima fore suggerimus*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 362).

29 Fulgentius frequently resorts to Augustine's texts and authority, also mentioning his works, notably in *Ep.* 5, 9; 12, 24.26; 14, 12–14.16–18.20.27–28.31.34.38.46; 15, 18; 18, 7–8. For a detailed study of Augustine's presence in Fulgentius' works and library, see Isola, A., (1997), 'In margine a una lettura dell'epistolario fulgenziano', *SEJG* 37, 57–110 reprinted in Isola (2011), 157–210, esp. 169–172.

himself to such study.<sup>30</sup> Fulgentius acts as an intermediary between Ferrandus and God, the *paterfamilias*, answering his queries as the attendant of the Gospel brings out “what is new and what is old” (Mt 13, 52).

Thus, in contrast to the situation described in the *De catechizandis rudibus* of Augustine, Fulgentius is the expert able to offer a reply on complex theological problems, not the bishop offering a concrete model of catechesis from his own experience. This is important to understand the letters: Ferrandus does not ask about the concrete ritual actions or teaching to be imparted to catechumens but about their function and meaning. He desires to know on what grounds the catechumenate, emergency baptism and the Eucharist are necessary and efficacious for his congregation. Against what is assumed in studies on the catechumenate discussing these letters, Ferrandus’ questions and Fulgentius’ answers do not aim at providing a description of rituals that could be used to reconstruct the initiation rites of Carthage.<sup>31</sup> The letters, instead, are illuminating accounts about the growing need at the time for standard statements that bring inherited liturgical practices in harmony with written traditions. I here first focus on Ferrandus’ letter, the description it gives of the catechumenate and the problems that it raises, before examining Fulgentius’ reply, the discrepancies between the questions and the answers and the broader picture that can be drawn from the exchange.

### 1.2.1 Ferrandus’ Description of the Rites of the Catechumenate

After the prologue, Ferrandus’ letter describes the issues raised by the initiation of the still unbaptised slave (*famulus*) of a certain religious man (*religiosus vir*) who was still an adolescent (*adolescens*)—thus probably between fifteen and thirty—, with black skin (*colore aethiops*) and brought from some distant region of Africa.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the peculiar reference to black Africans, this

30 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 1: “*Ego vero qui ingenii pauperis laboro penuria, neque multis oblatrantibus curis operari cibum sapientiae cotidiana divinae lectionis meditatione permittor, minus insuper praevalens meis, id est disputationum sive cogitationum mearum viribus investigare dubia, explanare obscura, dividere ac definire contraria, pulso crebris gemitibus ad caelestis patrisfamiliae ianuam. [...] Quorum quia unus ex numero talentorum tibi creditorum multiplicare lucra desideras, et caelestis scribae pretiosissimam margaritam, quam distractis omnibus quae habebas negotiator fidelissimus comparasti, generaliter acquirendam, possidendam, perfruendam, sine invidia tabescente communicas; profer, obsecro, de thesauro tuo, dispensator egregie, nova simul et vetera, quibus indigentem locupletes, esurientem pascas, imperitum doceas, dubitanti quid sequatur ostendas*” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 359–360).

31 See studies listed in note 22.

32 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2: “*Religiosi cuiusdam viri famulus aetate adolescens, colore Aethiops, ex ultimis credo barbarae provinciae partibus, ubi sicca hominum membra solis*

is, with John's letter to Senarius, the only other detailed description of the various steps of the catechumenate in any Latin source from the late antique West:

This man then is handed over to the church to be initiated (*imbuendus*) with the rites of the church thanks to the care of faithful masters; he is made a catechumen (*catechumenus*) according to custom. Then, after some time, with the approach of the Easter feast, he is offered, enrolled and instructed (*offertur, scribitur, eruditur*) among the candidates for baptism (*inter competentes*). When he knows the universal and venerable mysteries of the Catholic religion, having celebrated the examination as usual (*celebrato solemniter scrutinio*), he is protected by exorcism against the Devil; renouncing him openly as use required, he is brought out to hear the creed (*symbolum*). Moreover, having pronounced the exact words of the holy creed from memory, in a clear voice in the presence of the crowd of the faithful (*in conspectu fidelis populi*), he received the pious rule of the Lord's Prayer. Comprehending now both what he should believe and what he should pray, he was being prepared for baptism, when suddenly he is smitten by a severe fever [...].<sup>33</sup>

Ferrandus' description provides fresh evidence about little-attested rituals. It is a rare African witness of instruction about Christianity given at the entrance into the catechumenate as described in Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus*, using the same technical terms (*imbuere, catechumenum facere*).<sup>34</sup> In Ferrandus' community, as in Augustine's, converts are first made *catechumeni* with the reception of some rites (*sacramenta*) and wait some time before

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*ignei calore fuscantur, adductus, salutaris lavacri necdum fuerat aspersione mundatus, aut micante Christi gratia dealbatus*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 360).

33 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2: "*Hic ergo dominorum fidelium diligentia, sacramentis ecclesiasticis imbuendus, ad ecclesiam traditur; fit ex more catechumenus. Post aliquantum nihilominus tempus propinquantem solemnitate paschali inter competentes offertur, scribitur, eruditur. Universa quoque religionis catholicae veneranda mysteria cognoscens atque percipiens, celebrato solemniter scrutinio, per exorcismum contra diabolum vindicatur; cui se renuntiare constanter, sicut hic consuetudo poscebat, auditurus symbolum profertur. Ipsa insuper sancti symboli verba memoriter in conspectu fidelis populi clara voce pronuntians, piam regulam dominicae orationis accepit. Simulque iam et quid crederet et quid oraret intellegens, futuro baptismati parabatur, cum repente violentis invaditur febribus*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 360; Whitaker, E.C., (1960), *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London), 98 adapted).

34 Compare with Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 1, 1 and *Conf.* VIII, 2.4 (*imbuere*); *Cresc.* II, 5.7, *F. et op.* 12, 18, *C. litt. Pet.* III, 53.65, *Un. bapt.* 11, 19 (*catechumenum facere*).

entering the baptismal preparation as *competentes*. The verbs used to describe what happens next, *offere*, *scribere* and *erudire*, generically refer to the inscription of names at the beginning of the preparation, well attested in Augustine and other African sermons, and to some teaching given to the enrolled candidates. The features of the preparation—an examination (*scrutinium*), exorcisms, renunciation of the Devil preceding the learning and reciting of the creed and the Lord's Prayer in front of the faithful—remarkably recall African sermons. Augustine employs the same terms for the candidates, refers to an examination, exorcisms, and the catechesis on the creed and the Lord's Prayer. The sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus similarly link the renunciation to the creed, refer to an examination and insist on the fact that candidates are brought out in public to profess the creed.<sup>35</sup> Ferrandus is however a rare witness of the existence of a single examination, while African sermons provide evidence more difficult to interpret. However, despite these informative details, the letter cannot be used to reconstruct a precise sequence of initiation: most steps are only briefly evoked, often pointing to custom or tradition (*ex more*; *solemniter*; *consuetudo*). Moreover, the focus is on the actions of the local clergy, with the use of the passive voice throughout to describe the rites performed on the candidate. The time that the candidate spent as a catechumen before enrolling for baptism is only evoked (*aliquantum tempus*), while the ritual preparation takes the shape of a list with little evidence on how and when each rite is celebrated. Ferrandus' account is bound to remain open to interpretation and it would be perilous to draw conclusions on the exact order of the liturgical practices on the basis of this text.

It is only clear that candidates received catechesis, probably both on the creed and the Lord's Prayer, learning them after an examination not necessarily restricted to exorcisms, and happening towards the end of the initiation process before baptism. Ferrandus explains that the emergency baptism of the slave was postponed until Easter which occurred only a few days after he fell unconscious, so that he may be initiated together with other candidates.<sup>36</sup> Ferrandus also indicates that at the time of baptism, candidates were normally required to profess their faith by replying to questions, a practice that is attested in Africa from Tertullian's time, while the slave could not reply to these by himself.<sup>37</sup> Fulgentius' reply, mostly focusing on theoretical aspects, nevertheless

35 See Chapter 4, pp. 206–216 and Chapter 5, pp. 252–259.

36 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2: "*Persuasit dierum brevitās, ut ad fontem cum ceteris abluendus differretur, sive potius servaretur*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 360).

37 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2. See Tertullian, *De corona* 3, 2 (interrogation about the renunciation); for Augustine's evidence, Chapter 4 note 159.

corroborates the custom of interrogating candidates at baptism about their faith. He relates it to the earlier recitation of the creed (*symbolum*) and calls it a “second faith” (*secunda credulitas*), paralleling the second birth of baptism.<sup>38</sup> Fulgentius also describes the custom (*consuetudo*) mentioned by Ferrandus of the examination, renunciation of the Devil and recitation of the creed as pertaining to the Carthaginian church (*ecclesiae carthaginiensis*).<sup>39</sup> It is possible that by pointing to Carthaginian practice, Fulgentius wanted to highlight that Ferrandus’ description refers to specific rituals performed there in contrast to diverging practices elsewhere. In summary, the two letters, despite not focusing on the rites themselves but only alluding to common practice, display remarkable continuity in terms of the liturgical organisation of the initiation and offer valuable evidence for the persistence of the catechumenate for adults in sixth-century Africa, highlighting variety in initiation practices, and also mentioning the parallel practice of infant baptism, as it was the case in Augustine’s time.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.2.2 The Problems Raised by the Baptism of Unconscious Adults

These letters, however, are not only precious evidence for the study of practices: they shed light on recurrent pastoral problems that affected Christian communities in Late Antiquity. They are also essential witnesses to the gradual creation of normative views on initiation and the liturgy, bringing together inherited practices and written traditions. In fact, Ferrandus’ interest lies in obtaining a definitive statement from Fulgentius about important questions regarding the relation between the catechumenate and baptism. His brief description of the usual procedure is an incentive to start a broader discussion. Ferrandus depicts the scene of a candidate, unconscious, unable to speak, move or react and thus reply to the baptismal interrogations, receiving baptism completely unaware of it (*mente absentissimus*), others answering the questions in his

38 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 14: “*Nam hoc utique fuit hora baptismatis interrogandus, quod est antea in symboli pronuntiatione confessus*” and 16: “*Ipso ergo spiritu quo locutus est redens, redemptus est tacens, quoniam ipso spiritu nativitas secunda perficitur quo secunda credulitas datur*” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 370–371).

39 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 2: “*cui renuntiare constanter, sicut ecclesiae carthaginiensis, in qua iam, deo propitio, diaconus militas consuetudo poscebat*” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 363; in italics are Fulgentius’ comments on his quotation from Ferrandus’ letter).

40 Ferrandus then compares the emergency baptism of the candidate to the baptism of infants (*infantes/parvuli*): Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2: “*et pro eo nobis quasi pro infante respondentibus*”; 3: “*Nonne solos parvulos rite credimus offerentium fide salvari, quos originali tantum novimus iniquitate damnari?*”; Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 18: “*In cuius ablutione si quando illa aetas est, cui propria non possit inesse confessio, aliis credentibus et confitentibus, datur parvulis salus*” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 360–361 and 372).

place. The deacon remarks that this mirrored the way of baptising infants, the slave dying shortly thereafter wholly unconscious about what had happened.<sup>41</sup> The description of the emergency baptism of a candidate who had followed the standard procedure of initiation for adults during the catechumenate serves as a starting point to think about the effectiveness of such unconscious baptism for adult catechumens. Ferrandus' account echoes Augustine's writings, notably his description of the deathbed baptism of a dear friend in the *Confessiones*.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it is possible—besides the parallel with the eunuch in Acts 8, 3 employed by Fulgentius—that the reference to an Ethiopian candidate related to a common *topos* found in Augustine and other early Christian writers, where the whitening of the black Ethiopian, the paradigmatic pagan, is employed to describe the process of initiation from darkness to light.<sup>43</sup> The story of the candidate is presented as an exemplary case to reflect on how transformation is enacted during the catechumenate and baptism, bringing forward essential questions on the necessity and validity of the catechumenate and its relation to baptism to obtain eternal life after death.

Two main questions are asked, first about the consequences and usefulness of emergency baptism, then about the necessity of receiving the Eucharist after baptism as part of the ritual of initiation. While the second question is particularly interesting in regard to the later disintegration of the initiation rituals in the West, only the first question is directly relevant for the catechumenate.<sup>44</sup> Ferrandus asks whether emergency baptism of a candidate unable to speak may harm his hopes to gain "eternal blessedness".<sup>45</sup> This broad question is accompanied by his own views and doubts. For Ferrandus, the baptism of an adult catechumen who is unable to speak or show awareness is problematic because of the distinction between adults—who need the cleansing of original and own sins and have reached the age of reason thus being capable of stating

41 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 2: "*Tunc ille in extremo halitu constitutus, sine voce, sine motu, sine sensu, nihil valens sacerdoti interroganti respondere, deferentium manibus apportatur; et pro eo nobis quasi pro infante respondentibus, mente absentissimus accepit baptismum; quod se accepisse, post paululum mortuus, in hac praesenti, quantum arbitror, vita nescivit*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 360).

42 Augustine, *Conf.* IV, 4.8: "*baptizatus est nesciens*" and "*mente atque sensu absentissimus*" (Verheijen, *CCSL* 27 (1981), 43–44). *Absentissimus* is extremely rare, only found in Augustine's *Confessiones* and Ferrandus' letter in the *Library of Latin texts A* (<http://www.brepolis.net> last consulted 09/05/2019).

43 See Poque (1984) I, 268–269. Ferrandus may have read in particular Augustine, *In Ps.* 73, 16.

44 On this process, see the useful overview of Fisher (2004).

45 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3: "*Quaero nunc utrum nihil ei ad aeternam beatitudinem consequendam vox ablata nocuerit*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 360).

their will and confess their beliefs—and small children (*infantes/parvuli*) who are baptised through the will of others for the forgiveness of original sin. He wonders whether the slaves' speech was impaired by God because He did not want him to receive baptism.<sup>46</sup> Significantly, Ferrandus' doubts are not about infants but clearly about the need for a conscious and voluntary belief (*voluntaria credulitas*) in the case of adults. The deacon questions the usefulness of the slave's baptism: equating his physical incapacity to his lack of will ("*nec voluit nec valuit*"), he hesitates to accept that the profession of faith that he performed while fully conscious (*scientis*), granted him the remission of sins when he was unconscious (*nescientis*).<sup>47</sup> Ferrandus is reluctant to acknowledge that emergency baptism may have purified the slave from his sins on the grounds of the preparatory rituals because he believes that it would send the message that baptism is not needed.<sup>48</sup> As he then explains, why then not baptise after death those catechumens who had demonstrated their commitment but could not be baptised in time?<sup>49</sup> Thus, Ferrandus struggles with any substitute to the regular voluntary baptism of conscious adults.

Through his doubts, the deacon provides a rare reflection on the ambiguity of the status of catechumens, who have undergone a number of rituals but have not been purified through baptism. This is a crucial aspect, often discussed in previous chapters and particularly in Augustine. Ferrandus made of this ambiguity a pastoral problem, probably conveying questions that were asked in Carthage, since the death of catechumens before they could be baptised could trouble his community. He expected from Fulgentius a theological explanation to guide pastoral care. Significantly, the recourse to Fulgentius as an authority on Christian learning is connected to questions about African conciliar legisla-

46 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3: "*Valde enim timeo ne propterea dominus, cui omnia possibilia sunt, facultatem loquendi denegaverit, quia eum beneficio secundae nativitatis iudicavit indignum. Quomodo namque potuerit aetas illa rationis capax aliena confessioni purgari, non video*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 361).

47 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3: "*At hic proprio vivebat arbitrio; super illud quod de radice traxerat, multa sine dubio, victus propria cupiditate, contraxerat, plurimorum peccatorum vinculis obligatus, et non nisi voluntaria credulitate salvandus, quam in illo redemptionis loco confiteri, nec voluit, nec valuit; qui nihil sentiens, velle aliquid omnino non valuit. An fortassis scientis praeterita confessio remissionem peccatorum meruit etiam nescienti?*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 361).

48 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 3: "*Sed hoc dicere dubito, ne quis mihi veraciter dicat: Ergo salvus esset, si nec ad ipsam tinctionem corporis pervenisset; quoniam, sicut asseris, expiationis meritum per mysteria transacta meruerat*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 361).

49 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4: "*Postremo, cur non etiam mortuos baptizamus, quos a sacro baptismo repentina saepe mors abstulit, sed eorum tamen voluntas, fidelisque devotio nota omnibus fuit?*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 361).



tion: after raising doubts about emergency baptism, the deacon, well known as a compiler of African proceedings, ends his letter quoting a canon permitting emergency baptism of individuals unable to reply for themselves with the help of witnesses, extracted from the *Breviarium Hipponense* and re-issued at the council of Carthage in 525.<sup>50</sup> Given, on one hand, Ferrandus' doubts about the interpretation of the canon, and, on the other hand, as we will see, Fulgentius' concern to promote the application of this ruling, it seems plausible to argue for a link between the letter exchange and the council of 525. This may provide a context of writing for these poorly dated letters: Ferrandus perhaps put his query to Fulgentius in the aftermath of the council, asking Fulgentius, who was notably absent, for precisions on this canon promulgated more than a century earlier under Aurelius' and Augustine's supervision, now not fully understood or accepted. Another possibility is that the letter exchange preceded the council of 525, when it may have helped understanding and valuing the re-issuing of century-old canons. In either case, this connection gives weight to the interpretation of the letter exchange as an attempt to set normative views on initiation and complement conciliar legislation. Indeed, despite the significance attributed to canon law, Ferrandus notes that canons only say "what the Church should do (*quid ecclesia facere debeat*)" but not what the dying individual receives ("*quid ille percipiat*"). For Ferrandus, the canon ordered emergency baptism to clear clerics from the accusation of negligence (*culpa neglegentiae*), without addressing the question of its usefulness and effectiveness.<sup>51</sup> Fulgentius' reply is expected to clear his doubts and interpret narrow and specific legislation, thus giving depth and meaning to pastoral practice. Ferrandus' question ultimately sheds light on the problematic reception of African canon law and shows that, like the Bible, it could become a trustworthy source of authority when fully interpreted by an expert.

### 1.2.3 Fulgentius' Reply

Fulgentius gives a quite straightforward answer to Ferrandus. In providing clear-cut views, he satisfies his correspondent and readers. In contrast to the

50 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4: "*Video in hoc articulo posse usitatam canonum proponi sententiam, quae infirmos iubet, si pro se respondere non valeant, sed eorum voluntati testimonium sui proprio periculo dixerint, baptizari*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 361). This correspond to *Breviarium Hipponense*, *Canon* 32 and *Canon* 45 of the council of Carthage in 525.

51 Ferrandus in Fulgentius, *Ep.* 11, 4: "*Sub qua definitione magis arbitror quid ecclesia facere debeat imperatum, non quid ille percipiat indicatum; videlicet ut minister verbi liber sit a culpa neglegentiae, non ut ille ostendatur consors particepsque iustitiae*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 361).

ambiguous situation described by Ferrandus, and the slippery interpretation of emergency baptism, his letter aims at setting clear rules that offer a working compromise. Fulgentius argues for both a more positive appraisal of emergency baptism and for the necessity of a regular catechumenate for adults, in particular the need to learn the Christian faith and profess it before baptism. Before addressing Ferrandus' questions, Fulgentius sets his letter within a broader demonstration of the relation between faith and baptism and adopts an openly polemical tone against heretics, who are only generically named but probably represent the Arians. Thus, after quoting Ferrandus' description about the slave's initiation and the issues raised, the bishop starts with Jesus' last words underlining the necessity of both faith and baptism in Mark 16, 15–16 (*"Euntes in mundum uniuersum praedicate euangelium omni creaturae; et qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit, saluus erit; qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur"*) as the key text to answer Ferrandus' question about emergency baptism. For Fulgentius, faith is an unavoidable requirement, irrespective of baptism.<sup>52</sup> He thus dedicates the first half of his letter to the discussion of the meaning of believing and—on the basis of Paul's letters—distinguishes "true" (*vera*) from "fake" (*ficta*) faith, concluding that heretics and pagans cannot be said to believe in God because they have wrong opinions about God.<sup>53</sup>

Fulgentius then addresses Ferrandus' questions, drawing a fundamental distinction between the duty (*officium*) and the effect (*effectus*) of baptism, that is on one hand belief (*credulitas*) and profession of faith (*confessio fidei*), and on the other hand the renewal (*regeneratio*) through grace (*gratia*). Fulgentius concludes that when the two are performed, the candidate is saved: the slave performed the *officium* in full conscience, while the *effectus* was granted by the clergy.<sup>54</sup> Particular emphasis is put on the catechumenate as a necessary prerequisite, the part played by candidates, while the ritual efficiency of baptism is conferred by the clergy. Fulgentius sets Ferrandus' story in a biblical environment in order to write with more authority, finding a fitting parallel in the

52 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 3: "*Qui enim non crediderit, sive baptizetur, sive non baptizetur, sine dubitatione damnabitur*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 365).

53 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 6–12.

54 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 13: "[...] *illum puerum saluatum esse credamus, in quo nihil defuisse eorum quae ad baptismatis officium atque effectum pertinent inuenimus. Officium quippe secundae natiuitatis in fide et confessione, effectus autem in regeneratione constitit. [...] Manifestum est autem quod, sicut officium credulitatis et confessionis pertinet ad catechumenum, sic effectus baptismatis pertinet ad ministrum; et dum ab illo per veram fidem confessio promittitur, subsequenter est ut isto tingente salutaris mysterii gratia peragatur*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 369–370); these concepts are again presented at § 20.

baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch who is asked to believe before being baptised (Acts 8, 3). His letter defines a new rule (*regula*) according to which anyone who has performed the profession of faith and not changed his mind should receive baptism as a reward.<sup>55</sup> The bishop asserts that as long as the candidate has performed the preliminary rites of the catechumenate in full conscience, more precisely the reciting of the creed, he may be baptised with the help of others even if he is unconscious at baptism, since his wish to be baptised has already been clearly ascertained.<sup>56</sup> He further explains, to answer Ferrandus' comparison of emergency baptism and infant baptism, that the slave's baptism, as befits adults, did not lack a conscious profession of faith, despite being administered when the slave was unconscious. He thus received the full remission of his sins at baptism and his profession was confirmed by the members of the Church.<sup>57</sup> While underlining the significance of stating one's faith before baptism, Fulgentius also explains that it is only effective when followed by baptism. He underlines the strong bond between the catechumenate and baptism: they are to be performed and understood as a unity, respectively as the way to salvation (*via salutis*) and salvation itself.<sup>58</sup> The emergency baptism of adults is defended on the basis of the catechumenate, both in the case of the slave who had fulfilled all requirements of the initiation until a few days before baptism, but also more generally for any dying adult catechumen, provided that their commitment is clearly confirmed by witnesses.<sup>59</sup>

55 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 14: "*Quam regulam in actibus apostolorum sancti philippi videmus opere custoditam [...]. Qua ergo iustitia ille qui credulitatis et confessionis persolvit officium, non consequeretur sanctae regenerationis effectum? Nam si ordo attendatur operis et mercedis, opus est in fide et confessione, merces in baptismo. Ideo enim quisque dignus baptismate iudicatur, quia praecedat fidei confessionisque meritum, cui tamquam in mercedem sancti baptismatis debeat tribui sacramentum*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 370).

56 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 14: "*Nam hoc utique fuit hora baptismatis interrogandus, quod est antea in symboli pronuntiatione confessus. Nihil itaque illi ad aeternam beatitudinem consequendam vox ablata nocuit, quae quamdiu potuit, in ipsa fidei confessione permansit*"; 16: "*Immo sua invenitur confessione purgata, cui tunc aliorum confessio subsecuta prodesse non possit, si propria minime praecessisset. Ideo itaque illi aliorum confessio sine dubio profuit, quia non nolentem praevenit, sed deficienti subsecuta subvenit, et quod in illo voluntas illuminata credendo et confitendo coepit, hoc pro illo caritas fraterna perfecit*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 370–371).

57 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 18.

58 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 19: "*Qui si non baptizaretur, non solum nesciens, sed etiam sciens nullatenus salvaretur. Via enim salutis fuit in confessione, salus in baptismate. Nam in illa aetate, non solum ei confessio sine baptismate nihil prodesset, sed nec ipsum baptisma ei non credenti neque confitenti ullatenus proficeret ad salutem*" (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 373).

59 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 23: "*Proinde ideo debet, secundum paternos canones, infirmus ille cuius*

Fulgentius further takes the canon evoked by Ferrandus as authoritative legislation supporting his own views: after rejecting the baptism of the dead, he firmly asserts that “the pronouncement of the fatherly canons” (*canonum sententia paternorum*) does not contain any ambiguity; the canon issued by the holy fathers (*sancti patres*) clearly explained “what is done” as well as “what is received”, and it should be strictly followed.<sup>60</sup> Fulgentius notes that the canon would not have been promulgated if emergency baptism had no value for the candidates, and proves his point through a liturgical argument: such rites (*sacramenta*) would not be celebrated by the Church if they were not holding any power (*firmitas*).<sup>61</sup> Bringing together a set of biblical quotations, Fulgentius affirms the authority of the rules of the canons and of liturgical practices, dismissing the idea that emergency baptism may be done in vain. In fact, he notes that if the canon is promulgated to protect clerics from the accusation of negligence, as stated by Ferrandus, then it means that performing emergency baptism has some value. He thus argues that when ministers confer emergency baptism, it is meaningful and effective, and should be performed to avoid negligence.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, Fulgentius, commenting on the episode described by Ferrandus and on the meaning of the canon about emergency baptism, addressed central concerns of the community in Carthage. Tensions arising from the uncertain

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*voluntati non deest attestatio proximorum, sine dubio baptizari [...]* (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 377).

60 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 21: “*Proinde firmissime tenenda est illa canonum sententia paternorum [...]. Viderunt enim sancti patres ream non esse voluntatem quae impedita cognoscitur, non mutata; nec debere denegare sacramentum baptismatis, ubi firmitas cognoscitur voluntatis. Hoc autem statuantes sancti patres et quid ecclesia facere debeat et quid ille percipiat, indicarunt*” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 374–375).

61 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 21: “*Neque enim hoc ecclesia faceret, si ille nullum ex hoc facto beneficium percepisset. [...] quaecumque autem firmitas sacramentis eius demitur, ipsi ecclesiasticae necesse est auferatur. [...] quia veraciter columna et firmamentum veritatis (1Tim 3, 15) ab apostolo nuncupatur, quidquid secundum ipsius ecclesiae constituta, in sanctis mysteriis redemptionis ac reconciliationis humanae, intra eam datur et accipitur, firma veritate datur, firma veritate percipitur*” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 375).

62 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 22–23, esp. 23: “*Dixisti enim, propterea hoc paternis canonibus definitum, ut minister verbi liber sit a culpa neglegentiae. Quomodo autem in hac neglegentia culpam minister incurrit, si in diligentia non aliquid proficit?* [...]” (Fraipont, *CCSL* 91 (1968), 376). Fulgentius, at § 22 also notably quotes 1Cor 3, 6 about the increase given by God and interpreting it, in the steps of his predecessors, in connection to the evangelisation and baptism supervised by the clergy—the quotation was a key text in Optatus and Augustine’s rejection of the Donatists’ requirement about the ministers’ worthiness.

fate of catechumens were probably as widespread at the time as they were a century earlier. The doubts conveyed by Ferrandus about emergency baptism recall Curma's unconscious and dreamt baptism contrasted by Augustine with the regular procedure followed after he regained health, and Augustine's own perplexity when witnessing the baptism of his unconscious Manichaean friend.<sup>63</sup> The uncertainty following the death of a catechumen without baptism could come to the forefront at any time, questioning the value of a proper preparation before baptism. Ferrandus' doubts are to be related to the anxiety of pastors who want to enforce the catechumenate but also are pushed to accept the practice of emergency baptism. Fulgentius wrote to reassure him that the rules set in canons granted full efficiency to baptism in emergency, but that at the same time, a proper baptismal preparation was wholly justified and needed. Fulgentius rejects Ferrandus' doubts about the effectiveness of the main rites of the catechumenate in cases when catechumens have to receive baptism in emergency, underlining the unity of the ritual preparation that gives meaning and value to baptism, even if performed when the candidate is unconscious. Fulgentius' letter thus reconciles the practice of emergency baptism with the catechumenate for adults: as long as catechumens have shown their commitment, baptism should be granted. In adopting this position, Fulgentius provides a strong statement in favour of the necessity of the catechumenate: there would be no valid emergency baptism without individuals being first integrated into the Christian community and testifying to their faith. His views on the necessity of a conscious pre-baptismal commitment can be seen as strengthening those of Augustine, who already discussed the issue. In his *De adulterinis coniugiis*, Augustine, as Fulgentius, replied to a question of Pollentius about emergency baptism: should dying catechumens (*catechumeni*) be baptised? The bishop of Hippo replies that *catechumeni* have already shown their commitment to the Christian faith, and must be baptised when unable to state their will, as in the case of infants. This should be done even if their will is uncertain, since it seems probable that most of them actually wanted baptism. At the same time, however, Augustine is aware that some might question this openness and prefer to refrain from granting baptism in all cases; he thus interprets in his favour a set of biblical quotations, strengthening his position.<sup>64</sup> The sixth-century letter exchange can be read as the continuation

63 See Augustine, *Cura mort.* 12, 15; *Conf.* IV, 4.8.

64 Augustine, *Adult. coniug.* I, 26.33: "*Catechumenis ergo in huius vitae ultimo constitutis, seu morbo seu casu aliquo si compressi sint, ut, quamvis adhuc vivant, petere sibi tamen baptis-*

and refinement of Augustine's discussion. Ferrandus conveys the same doubts raised at Augustine's time, while Fulgentius, in his reply defending emergency baptism, follows in the steps of Augustine.<sup>65</sup> However, he is both more assertive about the validity of emergency baptism—defending it on the basis of conciliar legislation—and gives away some ground to those who question emergency baptism by setting as an unavoidable requirement the need of a previous profession of faith, ascertained with the help of witnesses.

### 1.3 Conclusion

In summary, the letters show remarkable continuity in terms of ritual practices and pastoral concerns, still centred on adult baptism rather than on infants. The letter exchange is the continuation of a long tradition: Fulgentius' expertise, like Augustine's before him, was required to write authoritative summaries meant to solve recurrent tensions arising from diverging opinions and practices in African communities regarding baptism. At the same time, however, his letter develops unprecedented views and goes further than Augustine, bringing together for the first time biblical texts, liturgical practices and African authorities of the past, both Christian writers (Augustine himself) and church legislation. Sermon 272 of the bishop of Hippo to the neophytes is quoted at length for Ferrandus' second question about the necessity of receiving the Eucharist before death, putting Augustine among the *sancti patres*.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, while Augustine, and after him pope Gelasius, had clearly argued that the Eucharist

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*mum, vel ad interrogata respondere non possint, prosit eis, quod eorum fide christiana iam nota voluntas est, ut eo modo baptizentur, quo modo baptizantur infantes, quorum voluntas adhuc nulla patuit. Non tamen propterea damnare debemus eos, qui timidius agunt, quam nobis videtur agi oportere, ne de pecunia conservo credita improvidius quam cautius iudicare voluisse iudicemur [...] Sed non solum incredibile est, nec in fine vitae huius baptizari catechumenum velle; verum etiam, si voluntas eius incerta est, multo satius est nolenti dare quam volenti negare, ubi velit an nolit sic non apparet, ut tamen credibilis sit eum, si posset, velle se potius fuisse dicturum ea sacramenta percipere, sine quibus iam credidit non se oportere de corpore exire" (Zycha, CSEL 41 (1900), 380), see further his demonstration at 26.33–28.35.*

- 65 It is worth investigating the early influence of Augustine's *Adult. coniug.* on African milieus. The earliest manuscript known of *Adult. coniug.*, Paris, BNF, lat. 13367, from the sixth century, perhaps written in Italy, and bearing numerous marginal notes, connects this work to other treatises and sermons of Augustine pertaining to initiation, morals and sexuality, notably *F. et op.* and sermons to *competentes* (S. 56 and 215).
- 66 Fulgentius, *Ep.* 12, 24–26, esp. 26: "*Quod etiam sanctos patres indubitanter credidisse ac docuisse cognoscimus. Beatus quippe Augustinus de hac re sermonem fecit admodum luculentum, et aptum aedificationi atque instructioni fidelium*" (Fraipont, CCL 91 (1968), 378). See Folliet (1989), 567–569.

was as necessary as baptism, Fulgentius distinguished them and only asserted the necessity of baptism.<sup>67</sup> The letters take the African written tradition as the starting point for new questions and answers, creating new rules enforcing the catechumenate and at the same time advocating for emergency baptism. The distinction made between the *officium* and the *effectus* of baptism is a novel synthesis negotiating a working balance for the initiation process, defining the position and duties of the converts and the clergy: the first are asked to follow the required preparation, the latter grant the reward of baptism in exchange, even in emergency. Far from witnessing a “medieval ritualisation” of practices or the generalisation of infant baptism, these African sources both demonstrate continuity and the inventive inheritance of the writings and practices of the past.

## 2 The Roman Catechumenate in Ostrogothic Italy: John the Deacon to Senarius

The growing need for clear statements on the necessity and utility of the catechumenate that is seen in the letter exchange between Ferrandus and Fulgentius finds remarkable parallels in the well-known exchange between Senarius and John the Deacon in Rome. John's letter, in contrast to its African counterpart, is examined in virtually every study of the catechumenate in the West after the fifth century, as it is the only detailed description about the initiation in Rome in Late Antiquity.<sup>68</sup> Despite its significance, scholars have often developed quite narrow views of John's letter, seeing it as proof of the decay

67 On Augustine see Bavaud (1996), 220–221. For Gelasius see *Ep.* 6, 5 (numbering according to Thiel's edition, see note 116).

68 The following studies discuss the letter in some detail: de Puniet (1925), 2604–2605; Dondeyne (1932), 751–759; Capelle, B., (1933b), ‘*Les Tractatus de baptismo* attribués à saint Maxime de Turin’, *QL* 18, 108–118; Chavassee (1948a, 1948b, 1951); Stenzel (1958), 201–209; Kretschmar (1970), 249–257; Saxer (1988), 589–595; Sobrero, G., (1992), *Anonimo Veronese. Omelie mistagogiche e catechetiche. Edizione critica e studio* (Rome), 188–195; Willis, G.G., (1994), *A History of Early Roman Liturgy to the Death of Pope Gregory the Great* (London), 118–127; Cavallo (1996), 224–236; Gillett, A., (2003), *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West*, 411–533 (Cambridge), 214–218; Fisher (2004), 5–7; Brakmann-Pasquato (2004), 474–475; Metzger-Dreus-Brakmann (2004), 564; Johnson (2007), 164–168; Ferguson (2009), 766–769; Verardi, A.A., (2016), ‘La liturgia battesimale tra VI e VII secolo: brevi riflessioni sulle fonti’, in Wyrwy, A.M., (ed.), (2016), *Miejsca chrztów, urzędzenia baptyzmalne i ceremoniał chrzcielny od starożytności chrześcijańskiej do soboru trydenckiego* (Poznań-Dzieskanowice), 251–264, at 254–255.

of the catechumenate due to the generalisation of infant baptism. This scholarship states that John and his contemporaries would only still perform on babies a sort of “ritual” catechumenate that they did not even understand, without any teaching dimension, far from the ancient lengthy catechetical and ritual preparation, which was, according to Angenendt (for instance), typical of the supposed ritualisation of Christianity in the Early Middle Ages.<sup>69</sup> Although useful to show the extent to which John’s letter offers a peculiar description of the catechumenate, such studies have not set his letter in its wider context of writing, perhaps because they were the work of scholars interested in reconstructing specific liturgical practices.<sup>70</sup> However, when situated in the broader debates about the catechumenate, John’s letter, like the exchange between Ferrandus and Fulgentius, is not simply a description of the rituals but a normative statement justifying the existence of the catechumenate in a polemical context, based on the authority of the “forefathers”. In fact, it is in continuity with earlier sources, synthesising arguments based on the rites of initiation for the refutation of heretics.

## 2.1 Author and Context of Composition

Discovered by Mabillon<sup>71</sup> in the only preserved manuscript written in Gaul in the mid-ninth century (Vatican City, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Reg. lat. 1709A, f. 24<sup>r</sup>–31<sup>v</sup>) in a fragmentary version—the final lines of the text are missing—the letter has been again edited by Wilmart together with a Carolingian *florilegium* on baptism, which extensively borrowed from it and served as complementary evidence on the text.<sup>72</sup> The letter was written by a certain deacon

69 Wiegand (1899), 144–145; Dondeyne (1932), esp. 754–757; Stenzel (1958), 201–209; Saxer (1988), 590–591 and 634–636; Sobrero (1992), 189; Cavallotto (1996), 237–238; Fisher (2004), 5–7. For the ritualisation of Christianity see Angenendt, A., (1984), *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe* (Berlin-New York), 21–32 and 45–57. This trend in scholarship is not limited to medieval Christianity: similar widespread narrow views of Roman religion as purely ritualistic have been successfully dismissed by Scheid, J., (2005), *Quand faire c’est croire. Les rites sacrificiels des Romains* (Paris) and lastly Scheid, J., (2018), *La religion romaine en perspective* (Paris), also available online at <https://books.openedition.org/cdf/5368> (last consulted 28/1/2020).

70 Saxer (1988), 589 and Johnson (2007), 164–165, amongst others, simply accept the dating of “around 500 AD” without any mention of the historical data about the individuals involved in the exchange.

71 Mabillon, J., (1724), *Museum Italicum*, volume 1 *pars altera* (Paris), 69–76 (edition) and 76–78 (comments).

72 John, *Epistula ad Senarium* (Wilmart (1933), 158–179). Dating and localisation according to Wilmart. Digitised at [http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Reg.lat.1709.pt.A](http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.1709.pt.A) (last consulted 13/01/2020).



John who replied to a lost letter of a *vir illustris* named Senarius, through an intermediary, the *vir spectabilis* Renatus.<sup>73</sup> Senarius is the most easily identifiable individual, because of the rarity of his name.<sup>74</sup> He was a court official and legate for King Theoderic (493–526AD) in Ravenna, attested in the 500s and 510s and in charge of several embassies in the East and West as clear from the *Variae* of Cassiodorus and his extant epitaph.<sup>75</sup> He also was a relative and correspondent of Ennodius of Pavia and Faustus Niger and was in close contact to prominent officials and aristocrats in Ravenna.<sup>76</sup> John's letter to Senarius was written close to that period, certainly after 1 September 509, when Senarius was promoted to the post of *comes patrimonii* by Theoderic—in charge of the government income—and to membership of the Senate, and was thus first called *vir illustris*.<sup>77</sup> His involvement in diplomatic affairs from Gaul to the pope and the Church in Constantinople was such that the bishop Avitus of Vienne wrote to him in 515–516 to obtain information from pope Hormisdas about the embassy sent from Rome to Constantinople in 515 to put an end to the Acacian schism.<sup>78</sup>

Renatus, who carried Senarius' letter from Ravenna, is more difficult to identify but perhaps he was the *vir clarissimus et spectabilis* Martius Novatus Renatus, an Italian aristocrat fluent in Greek who travelled to Constantinople

73 *Ep. ad Sen.* 1: "Domino merito inlustri semperque magnifico filio Senario, Iohannes diaconus. Sublimitatis vestrae paginam filio nostro spectabili viro Renato deferente suscepimus" (Wilmart (1933), 170).

74 It has been suggested that his name may be of Gothic origin, however there is no clear evidence to support this claim, while Senarius is known to be a relative of Ennodius (see below). See Sundwall, J., (1919), *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden Römertums* (Helsinki), 153; Amory, P., (2003), *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy*, 489–554 (Cambridge), 413; Gillett (2003), 198 n. 73–75; Giardina-Cecconi-Tantillo (2014), 315.

75 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV, 3.7.11.13 (with the commentaries and bibliography provided respectively by Lo Cascio, E., Oppedisano, F., Tarzillo, I., Marcone, A., in Giardina, A., Cecconi, G.A., Tantillo, I., (eds.), (2014–2017), *Varie* (Rome), II, 315–317, 320–322, 325–326, 328). These letters are now also available in English translation, see Bjornlie, S., (2019), *The Variae. The Complete Translation* (Oakland CA), 167–168, 170–171, 173–174. For his epitaph: text in Mommsen, *MGH, AA*, XI, 499 (index under 'Senarius') and translation in Gillett (2003), 194–195. See for more on Senarius: Sundwall (1919), 153–154; *PLRE* 2 (1980), 988–989; 'Senarius', *PCBE* 2 (1999), 2020–2021; Amory (2003), 413; Gillett (2003), 190–219.

76 Ennodius, *Ep.* I, 23; III, 11 and 34; IV, 27 and 33; V, 15; VI, 8, 12 and 27; VII, 5; VIII, 7. See Gillett (2003), 200–204. On Faustus: Sundwall (1919), 117–120; *PLRE* 2 (1980), 454; 'Faustus 4', *PCBE* 2 (1999), 756–759.

77 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV, 3 (to Senarius) and 4 (to the Senate).

78 Avitus of Vienne, *Ep.* 39 [36].

where he was involved in theological debates, and who possessed and revised manuscripts of Boethius' works on dialectic between the 510s and the 520s.<sup>79</sup>

It is thus very likely that John has to be identified with the deacon and friend of Boethius, who, in the 510s, acted as reviewer and transcriber of Boethius' works—notably the *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*—and then asked him a number of theological questions on Trinitarian debates that triggered the composition of treatises like the *De persona et duabus naturis* and the *Quomodo substantiae in eo quod sint, bonae sint*.<sup>80</sup> He may perhaps also be identified with the future pope John I (523–526), in which case the letter should date between 509 and 523, although there is no way to prove this identification.<sup>81</sup> Boethius' request that John should send a list of corrections and otherwise put the work *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* among those under his name in his library ("*mei nominis hoc quoque inseras chartis*"), presupposes that John had a prominent position as a scholar but also in the Roman Church, with access to a library and the staff and material required for copying manuscripts.<sup>82</sup>

All this gives some insights to understand John's remark in the prologue of his letter to Senarius, and more broadly to shed light about the context of composition: Senarius asked him to write to him and to transcribe works for him (*dirigi transcripta*).<sup>83</sup> Together with the usual statement of modesty and unworthiness to accomplish the task and complaints about his poor health and

79 See Jahn, O., (1851), 'Über die Subskriptionen in den Handschriften römischer Classiker', *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich-Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-Historische Classe* 3, 354–355; Sundwall (1919), 151. For the likely identification with the Renatus in Severus of Antioch see 'Martius Novatus Renatus 1', *PLRE* 2 (1980), 939 and 'Renatus 3', *PCBE* 2 (1999), 1888–1889. Another contemporary who revised manuscripts of Boethius was perhaps Flavius Theodorus ('Fl. Theodorus 63', *PLRE* 2 (1980), 1098). For late antique and early medieval subscriptions in manuscripts see now Wallenwein, K., (2017), *Corpus subscriptionum. Verzeichnis der Beglaubigungen von spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Textabschriften (saec. IV–VIII)* (Stuttgart).

80 On Boethius and John: Rand, E.K., (1901), 'Der dem Boethius zugeschriebene Traktat de fide catholica', *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie, Supplementband* 26 (Leipzig), 407–461, at 442–446.

81 See 'Iohannes 26', *PCBE* 2.1 (1999), 1074–1075.

82 Boethius, *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, Proem.: "*Quod si recte se habere pronuntiaveris, peto ut mei nominis hoc quoque inseras chartis; sin vero vel minuendum aliquid vel addendum vel aliqua mutatione variandum est, id quoque postulo remitti, meis exemplaribus, ita ut a te revertitur, transcribendum*" (Moreschini, C., (2000), *Boethius, Opuscula Theologica* (Munich-Leipzig), 208).

83 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 1: "*Nam, ut vestrae loquuntur litterae, quaedam vobis scribi, quaedam dirigi transcripta voluistis; sed in transcribendo curam nostram utcumque notariorum labor adiuvit, in his vero quae scribenda sunt multum fateor laboris indicitis, et supercadere hoc mensuram meam adducta fronte respondeo*" (Wilmart (1933), 170–171).

busy clerical office, John also remarks that a proper reply needs time and the consultation of the books of the forefathers (*maiorum volumina*).<sup>84</sup> In fact the deacon ends his prologue underlining that he will arrange the order of his reply as he sees fit and not following the order of Senarius' questions.<sup>85</sup> As in the case of the exchanges with Boethius, John is solicited both because of his skills and because of the library and staff at his disposal. The answer he provides is not intended to cover every aspect of Senarius' questions in detail, but rather gives a broad summary on the topics raised. Moreover, it complements the works sent to Senarius, notably a book "On heresies", which was apparently sent together with the letter.<sup>86</sup>

## 2.2 *Senarius' Questions and Their Background*

Senarius' questions concern liturgical practices performed during the Lenten and Easter periods: he asked for the reasons behind the performance of the catechumenate, why there was an episcopal privilege of conferring the chrism, why the Catholic Church did not rebaptise heretics, what the difference was between the exorcists and the acolytes, why there were seven altars consecrated in Rome at Easter, why milk and honey were mixed for the Eucharist at Easter, why the Alleluia was chanted after Easter until Pentecost in Rome, and finally whether dying without receiving the chrism was harmful.<sup>87</sup> Although Senarius also asked for the meaning of some rites or technical words used in the liturgy, the main focus of his questions are the origin and justification behind Roman liturgical practices. Thus John's reply provides such a justification of Roman practices, based on the Bible and the writings of predecessors (*maiores*).<sup>88</sup> Senarius may have relayed questions that were asked by new converts or potential converts, as suggested by Gillett.<sup>89</sup> However, John's reply is not

84 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 1: "Postremo otiosum tempus res postulat ut maiorum volumina recensentibus quid de una quaque re dici debeat illorum tuta iuvamine procedat oratio" (Wilmart (1933), 171).

85 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 1: "Illud interea prudentiae vestrae praedico quia inquisitionum ordo non ita ut vestra legitur pagina consequetur, sed, ut se unaquaeque suggesserit, absolutione congrua terminabitur" (Wilmart (1933), 171).

86 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 9: "De Pelagianis autem, Eutycianis, sive Nestorianis aperta et vulgata sunt omnia, quae, in libro de haeresibus cum legeritis, plenius poteritis advertere" (Wilmart (1933), 176). This work cannot be identified, it perhaps corresponds to Augustine's *De haeresibus* including the later addition of the appendix, see Gillett (2003), 214–215 n. 146.

87 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 2.7.9–14.

88 John employs the term quite frequently: *Ep. ad Sen.* 1 (*maiorum volumina*), 11 (*maiores nostri*, *maioribus tradita*, *maiorum ratio*), 13 (*maioribus tradita*), 14 (*a maioribus dictum est*), Wilmart (1933), 171, 177–178.

89 Gillett (2003), 214–218.

simply a manual of rites, but an argued synthesis on Roman practices attentive to theological controversies and aimed at a learned Christian audience. It is worth reflecting about the possible political implications of Senarius' queries: in the context of the Gothic kingdom and its relations with the Byzantine East, his questions about rebaptism and Roman liturgical practices and John's reference to the difficult situation in Africa preventing bishops from claiming the privilege of conferring the chrism all relate well to the contemporary controversy with Arians both in Africa and Italy.<sup>90</sup> They also fit more broadly within a well-documented context of contemporary epistolary exchanges between Italian aristocrats and clerics about theological controversies, which deeply influenced church politics.<sup>91</sup> Despite the fact that it is sent to a layman, the letter may also be compared to some extent to papal letters enforcing Roman liturgical practices and replying to queries of their correspondents, for which there is a number of examples in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>92</sup> The letter itself, however, does not provide any information about its background, John only noting that Senarius was guided by his "*catholica sollicitudo*" when he wrote to him, suggesting that Senarius himself was a Catholic.<sup>93</sup> If unanswered, Senarius' questions could become a challenge for Catholics in Rome, who were expected, in John's name, to justify the customs of their Church.

90 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 8: "*Sed nec illud tangat animum quod sibi aliquando quaedam vis necessitatis assumit, vel uti quod nunc per Africam fieri dicitur, ut presbyteri sanctum chrisma conficiant, quod merito moveret, si istam pontificalis auctoritatis licentiam non dedisset. Unde constat etiam nunc a pontificibus quodam modo fieri quod in tanta rerum necessitate, ut a presbyteris effici possit, superior ordo constituit*" (Wilmart (1933), 175–176); on rebaptising heretics see § 9.

91 A good example is Faustus—probably Faustus Niger, a correspondent of Senarius—who solicited a letter from the priest Trifolius: *Ep. ad beatum Faustum senatorem contra Ioannem Scytham monachum* (ed. F. Glorie *CCSL* 85 (1972), 137–141). Trifolius' letter discussed the theopaschite formula of Scythian monks from Constantinople debated in the late 510s—see more in this chapter on the related letter to the African bishops—and prompting pope Hormisdas' decision to expel the monks (see 'Faustus 4', *PCBE* 2.1 (1999), 756–759 and 'Trifolius', *ibid.* 2.2, 2213–2214; Sotinel, C., (2001), 'Le rôle des expertises dans les débats théologiques du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *SP* 34, 235–249, esp. 242–245 (on Trifolius' letter); Blaudeau, Ph., (2012), *Le siège de Rome et l'Orient (488–536). Étude géo-ecclésiologique* (Rome), 188–191). John the Deacon asked Boethius about the same topic, who replied with the treatise *Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus de divinitate substantialiter praedicentur*. For more on the exchanges between the clergy and the aristocracy in Italy see Pietri, Ch., (1997a), 'Aristocratie et société cléricale dans l'Italie chrétienne au temps d'Odoacre et de Théodoric', in *Id.*, (1997b), *Christiana Respublica*, 3 volumes (Rome), II, 1007–1057, esp. 1027–1033.

92 See the letters mentioned in notes 99–100.

93 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 1. See further references on Senarius as a Catholic in Gillett (2003), 217 n. 157.

Thus, the purpose of John's letter is not to offer a linear description of the liturgy, but to show why practices are authoritative and on what basis. The initial part of the letter (§ 2–4) focuses on the catechumenate. It is noteworthy that Senarius' questions on this topic are the only ones to be quoted in detail:

You ask me to tell you why before a man is baptised he must first become a catechumen (*catechumenus fiat*); or what the meaning is of the word or of the word "catechising" (*catechizatio*); in what rule (*regula*) of the Old Testament it is set out; or whether indeed the rule is a new one, deriving rather from the New Testament. Also you ask what a scrutiny (*scrutinium*) is, and why infants are scrutinised (*scrutinentur infantes*) three times before Easter: and what purpose is served by this care and preoccupation with these scrutinies (*scrutaminis*), etc.<sup>94</sup>

Senarius, like Ferrandus, did not expect from John a detailed description of the actions performed during catechumenate. Taken literally, his questions would mean that he did not understand the catechumenate and that, as a Christian himself, he failed to receive any explanation on the rites that he received or witnessed. However, a closer look shows that his questions are subtler: the focus is not simply on the rites themselves, but on the interpretation and justification of catechumenal practices—the admission into the catechumenate, the teaching and examination of candidates before baptism—on the basis of biblical rules, old or new. Instead of answering these specific questions only, John provides a summary of the catechumenate, from the admission process to baptism, also including a description of post-baptismal rites.

## 2.3 *John's Answer*

### 2.3.1 The Rites of the Catechumenate

John goes back to the very beginning of the history of mankind, original sin and the resulting captivity endured by humanity. The catechumenate is required to free candidates from the power of the Devil:

94 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 2: "*Requiro—inquis—a vobis quare, antequam baptisma quis consequatur, catechumenus fiat, vel quid sibi habeat hoc vocabulum aut haec catechizatio, aut qua regula in veteri testamento praemissa sit, aut certe si novella regula est et magis a novo testamento sumpsit exordium; simul etiam scrutinium quid sit aut quare tertio ante pascha scrutinentur infantes, aut quid sibi haec destrictio vel sollicitudo scrutaminis vindicet, et cetera*" (Wilmart (1933), 171; Whitaker (1960), 144 adapted).

I am confident that you are sufficiently versed in such matters as to know that the whole human race, while still so to speak in its cradle, should properly have fallen in death through the waywardness of the first man: and no rescue was possible except by the grace of the Saviour. [...] There cannot therefore be any doubt that before a man is reborn in Christ he is held close in the power of the Devil: and unless he is extricated from the Devil's toils, renouncing him among the first beginnings of faith with a true confession, he cannot approach the grace of the saving laver. And therefore he must first enter the classroom of the catechumens. *Catechesis* is the Greek word for instruction. He is instructed through the Church's ministry, by the blessing of one laying his hand [upon his head], that he may know who he is and who he shall be: in other words, that from being one of the damned he becomes holy, from unrighteousness he appears as righteous, and finally, from being a servant he becomes a son [...]. He receives therefore exsufflation and exorcism, in order that the Devil may be put to flight and an entrance prepared for Christ our God: so that being delivered from the power of darkness he may be *translated to the kingdom* (Co. 1, 13) of the glory of the love of God: so that a man who till recently had been a vessel of Satan becomes now a dwelling of the Saviour. And so he receives exsufflation, because the old deceiver merits such ignominy. He is exorcised, however, that is to say he is adjured to go out and depart and acknowledge the approach of him whose upright image he had cast down in the bliss of paradise by his wicked counsel. The catechumen receives blessed salt also, to signify that just as all flesh is kept healthy by salt the mind which is drenched and weakened by the waves of this world is held steady by the salt of wisdom and of the preaching of the word of God: so that it may come to stability and permanence, after the distemper of corruption is thoroughly settled by the gentle action of the divine salt. This then is achieved by frequent laying on of the hand, and by the blessing of his Creator called over his head three times in honour of the Trinity.<sup>95</sup>

95 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 3: "*Studium vestrum nosse confidimus quia omne genus humanum in ipsis, ut ita dicam, mundi cunabulis praeveraricatione primi hominis in morte fuerit iure conlapsum, nec ab ea posse redimi nisi affluerit gratia salvatoris [...]. Non est ergo dubium quod, priusquam aliquis renascatur in Christo, diabolicae potestate teneatur adstrictus, cuius laqueis nisi inter ipsa primum fidei rudimenta veraci professione renuntians exuatur ad salutaris lavacri gratiam non accedit; et ideo hunc oportet prius catechumenorum auditorium introire. Catechesis enim graece instructio dicitur. Instruitur namque aecclesiastico ministerio per*

The practices of the catechumenate witnessed by Senarius and John recall earlier sources, his description of the entrance into the catechumenate mentioning an instruction and rites that are all attested in Augustine's writings: laying of hands repeated over time, exorcism and exsufflation, the giving of salt.<sup>96</sup> The rites mentioned are further enriched by explanations of their meaning and purpose, notably the salt understood both as a sign of wisdom and a remedy for corruption. John's account particularly dwells on ritual gestures meant to expel the Devil in candidates. After discussing the entrance, John also refers to the second phase of the catechumenate, the baptismal preparation:

And so by the efforts of himself and others the man who recently had received exsufflation and had renounced the toils and the pomps of the Devil is next permitted to receive the words of the creed (*symbolum*) which was handed down by the Apostles: so that he who a short time before was called simply a catechumen (*catechumenus*), may now be called a *competens* or *electus*. For he was conceived in the womb of Mother Church and now he begins to live, even though the time of the sacred birth is not yet fulfilled. Then follow those occasions which according to the Church's custom are commonly called scrutinies. For we scrutinise their hearts through faith, to ascertain whether since the renunciation of the Devil the sacred words have fastened themselves on his mind: whether they acknowledge the future grace of the Redeemer: whether they confess that they believe in God the Father Almighty.<sup>97</sup>

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*benedictionem inponentis manum, ut intellegat quis sit qui ne futurus sit, hoc est quia ex damnabili sanctus fiat, ex iniusto iustus appareat, ad postremum filius fiat ex servo [...]. Exsufflatus igitur exorcizatur, ut, fugato diabolo, Christo domino nostro paretur introitus, et a potestate, erutus tenebrarum, transferatur in regnum gloriae caritatis dei, ut qui dudum vas fuerat satanae fiat nunc domicilium salvatoris. Exsufflatur itaque, quia talis dignus est ignominia desertor antiquus; exorcizatur autem, id est coniuratur, ut exeat et recedat, illius agnoscens adventum cuius erectam in paradisi felicitate imaginem prava suasionem deiecerat. Accipit etiam catechumini benedictum sal in quo signatur, quia, sicut omnis caro sale condita servatur, ita sale sapientiae et praedicationis verbi dei mens fluctibus saeculi madida et fluxa conditur, ut ad soliditatem stabilitatis atque permansionis digesto paenitus corruptionis humore divini salis suavitate perveniat. Hod ergo a(g)it frequens impositio manus et in reverentia trinitatis invocata super caput eius tertio benedictio conditoris" (Wilmart (1933), 171–172; Whitaker (1960), 144–145).*

96 See Chapter 2, 1.2, pp. 104–114.

97 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 4: "Dehinc quodam profectu atque propectu ille qui dudum exsufflatus diabolicis laqueis pompisque renuntiaverat symboli ad apostolis traditi iam meretur verba

Here, again, John follows on earlier tradition, employing the alternative technical terms *competens* and *electus* to refer to the candidates, and mentioning the key rites of the renunciation to the Devil and the learning and reciting of the creed. The description of the process of initiation with the imagery of the growth within the womb of the Church, recalls a common theme in earlier African texts.<sup>98</sup> John's description of the scrutiny (*scrutinium*) is unique in the late antique West. From Senarius' question we also learn that it was repeated three times in Rome and took place before Easter, perhaps in accordance with earlier Roman sources and certainly in contrast to a single session mentioned in Ferrandus' account.<sup>99</sup> Senarius and/or the deacon had perhaps read the papal decretals of the fourth and fifth centuries generically referring to the necessity of performing scrutinies before Easter.<sup>100</sup> John, however, describes them in more detail as an examination of faith to ascertain that the candidates have renounced the Devil, perhaps hinting at the recitation of the creed, with reference to Rm 10, 10 and 17 both key texts often quoted in sermons on the creed in Africa and Italy, while the examination recalls Augustine's Sermon 216.<sup>101</sup> Before discussing the baptismal rites, the deacon finally outlines the pre-baptismal rite of anointment of the ears and nostrils (*apertio aurium*), which is

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*suscipere, ut qui paulo ante solum catechuminus dicebatur nunc etiam vocetur competens vel electus. Conceptus enim est in utero matris aecclesiae, et vivere iam inceptit, etiam si nondum sacri partus tempus explevit. Tunc fiunt illa quae ab aecclesiastica consuetudine scrutinia dictitantur. Perscrutatur enim eorum corda per fidem utrum menti suae post renuntiationem diaboli sacra verba definierint, utrum agnoverint futuram gratiam redemptoris, utrum se credere fateantur in deum patrem omnipotentem*" (Wilmart (1933), 173; Whitaker (1960), 145–146 adapted). The quotations of Rm 10, 10 and 17 follow.

98 For instance: Augustine, S. 216, 7; S. 352A (= Dolbeau 14), 3; (Quodvultdeus), Sy 1, 1.

99 See note 100. The only Roman source mentioning a third scrutiny ("*tertio scrutinium scrutatus*") is the papal letter *Ad Gallos* written by Damasus or Siricius (see Duval, Y.-M., (2005), *La décrétale Ad gallos episcopos: son texte et son auteur. Texte critique, traduction française et commentaire* (Leiden-Boston), 1–18 arguing for the attribution to Damasus and presenting contrasting viewpoints, and 38–39 for the edition of the passage on the scrutiny). For scrutinies in early medieval liturgy, notably with the development of seven scrutinies instead of three in Rome, see Dondeyne (1932), 751–787; Chavasse (1948b) and Fisher (2004), 2–47.

100 See the letter *Ad Gallos*; Siricius, Ep. 1, 3 (to Himerius of Tarragona) and Leo the Great, Ep. 16, 6 (to the bishops of Sicily). Other decretals may have been used, particularly a passage of Innocentius' letter to Decentius of Gubbio on the episcopal privilege of conferring the chrism (Ep. 25; see Connell, M.F., *Church and Worship in Fifth-Century Rome: The Letter of Innocent I to Decentius of Gubbio* (Cambridge, 2002), 28–33).

101 John, Ep. ad Sen. 4; see Chapter 4 for Augustine, and for Italy: Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 18, 8; AN Veron 5, 2 = PS-MAX tr 1 = CPPM 1117 (Inc.: "*Omnis quidem Dei sermo, fratres charissimi*"), attributed to Augustine in the earliest manuscripts.



unknown in Africa, but interpreted in different ways by Ambrose and a probably late fifth-century Italian pseudo-Augustinian sermon, both close to John's description.<sup>102</sup>

### 2.3.2 Justifying the Catechumenate: Liturgical Performance and Written Tradition

John's summary has often been deemed to focus excessively on ritual actions, particularly his presentation of the catechetical process as a laying of hands to expel the Devil, and often interpreted as evidence that he reduced the catechumenate to a series of rites without any attention to the conversion process, supposedly because most candidates were small children.<sup>103</sup> Although Senarius' questions focused on *infantes*, it remains unsure whether the term has to be understood literally to mean babies or whether it might correspond to the status of catechumens as newborns in the Christian community. In either case, it is clear that John's reply summarises the main steps of the catechumenate for adults as witnessed in several sources from Late Antiquity and thus perfectly fits with a situation in which both adults and children were initiated. Moreover, John concludes his discussion of the catechumenate with this precision: "I must say plainly and at once, in case I seem to have overlooked the point that all these things are done even to small children (*parvuli*), who by reason of their youth understand nothing".<sup>104</sup> It appears clearly that his main account was written with adults in mind but that children too could be initiated. We need not to follow Dondeyne's and Fisher's convoluted reading, when they state that John's definition of the scrutiny as an examination with a public renunciation and profession of faith implies adult candidates only because John's synthesis was "the work of a learned man, who admits that he has made use of earlier documents".<sup>105</sup>

102 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 4–6; Ambrose, *De Mysteriorum* I, 2 and *De Sacramentis* I, 2; AN Veron 5 (see the attempt of demonstrating John's borrowing in Sobrero (1992), 187–195; for the opposite thesis: Capelle (1933b), 112–114). Another description is given in a pseudo-Maximus sermon published by Étaix, R., (1996), 'Catéchèse inédite sur Ephpheta', *REAug* 42, 65–70.

103 See note 69.

104 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 7: "*Illud autem ne pretermisum videatur, ante praedicimus, quod ista omnia etiam parvulis fiant, qui adhuc pro ipsius aetatis primordio nihil intellegunt*" (Wilmart (1933), 175; Whitaker (1960), 147).

105 Quotation from Fisher (2004), 7 who himself referred to Dondeyne (1932), 757. Fisher, among others, argued that the scrutinies were limited to exorcisms, although it is clearly against John's definition. A broader understanding of the word, adopted by Dondeyne (1932), as referring to meetings when candidates were taught, examined and performed rites would be more accurate.

In fact, the focus on rituals and the reception of written traditions has to be understood within the objective of his text: demonstrating the necessity of the catechumenate and on what basis it has been established. The rites performed are related to their origin and meaning in the history of salvation, that is the relationship between God and man as narrated in the Bible from the time of creation. For John the ritual performance is a mirror of this history. While John is attentive to the existence of liturgical diversity, notably when discussing specifically Roman practices,<sup>106</sup> he nevertheless also insists, in the same way as Fulgentius did, on the fact that liturgical performances witnessed by everyone and which have become part of custom cannot be done in vain.<sup>107</sup> Concerning the catechumenate in particular, John's answer does not even contemplate the possibility that the rites performed may not be necessary, but on the contrary it takes the rites as the basis for demonstrating their usefulness, when correctly interpreted. John openly makes use, not only of the Bible and salvation history, but of the Christian written tradition (*maiorum volumina*) as a source of inspiration to interpret the rites. However, in contradistinction to Isidore of Seville, who would later write a short definition of catechumens as pagans converting to Christianity,<sup>108</sup> for John, the catechumenate is a necessary ritual cleansing to obtain grace at baptism. Crucially therefore, John's reply is not an artificial synthesis on the rites of the catechumenate based on earlier documents—akin to modern scholarly work reconstructing ancient liturgy—but instead it combines first-hand experience of liturgical performances of initiation—perhaps particularly as a deacon in charge of initiating catechumens—with the theological interpretations of Christian writers of the past found in his library. The rites practised at his time and the inherited written interpretations reinforce each other to argue for the necessity of the catechumenate in a context of polemics.

106 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 7 and 13: there is no episcopal privilege of the chrism in Africa at the time because of necessity; chanting the Alleluia until Pentecost is a Roman custom not necessarily to be followed elsewhere. John also distinguishes between what is shared by Christians everywhere on the basis of the Scriptures, the teaching of the Fathers (*"instituta patrum"*) and the canons of Nicea, and local practices inherited from the forefathers (*"maioribus tradita"*).

107 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 11 on the consecration of seven altars.

108 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 11, 21: *"Caticumini sunt qui primum de gentilitate veniunt habentes voluntatem credendi in Christo [...]"* (Lawson, C.W., (ed.), *CCSL* 113 (1989), 95–96).

### 2.3.3 John's Use of the Liturgical Argument in Renewed "Post-Pelagian" Polemics

The context of divisions within Christianity and the need to argue for "Catholic" practices and interpretations permeates John's endeavour and helps further explain his focus. Senarius' questions may simply be those of a curious layman, wondering about the origins and meaning of liturgical practices, without any specific polemic in mind. His questions, however, offered John the opportunity to define the position of the Roman Church that he represented in contrast to heretics. John follows argumentative techniques inherited from the preceding century and near contemporaries, close parallels in his text even pinpointing specific contacts that shed light on his argumentation. The prologue on original sin finds parallels in Augustine, Prosper, Leo the Great and the *Praedestinatus*,<sup>109</sup> while the reply to Senarius' question follows in the steps of Augustine when it justifies the need for pre-baptismal purification by referring to the performance of exorcism and *exsufflatio*, quoting Col 1, 13. Indeed, as we have seen, the bishop of Hippo repeatedly referred to these rites that he said were performed on infants as well—more specifically the combination of the verbs *exorcizare* and *exsufflare*—as evidence for original sin and the necessity of infant baptism, also quoting the same passage from Colossians.<sup>110</sup> Far from simply witnessing the existence of similar rites in Africa and Italy, as liturgists have assumed, John's closely followed an approach already developed in Augustine.<sup>111</sup>

More broadly, John's letter needs to be set in the context of the revival of anti-Pelagian polemics going along with the reception of Augustine's teaching on grace in fifth- and early sixth-century Italy.<sup>112</sup> Shortly after Augustine's death, Prosper of Aquitaine wrote the *Praetitorium Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum*

109 John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 3: "*praevaricatione primi hominis*" a phrase commonly found in Augustine's polemics with Julian (*C. Iul. imp.* 1, 71–72; 11, 85, 105, 187, 193, 214; 111, 56, 173, 177–178, 185–186, 187, 205, 207 etc.) and in *Praedestinatus* 11, 6; 111, 27–28; Prosper, *Contra collatorem* 5, 3; 9, 2 and 5; 10, 1; 14, 2. See also for *Ep. ad Sen.* 3 "*homo [...]* *fieri non est dignatus in tempore*": Leo the Great, *Sermo* XXII, 1 (*De Natale Domini*, Chavasse, A. (ed.), CCL 138 (1973), 91–92) repeated in the *Tomus ad Flavianum* (= Leo, *Ep.* 28). For "*ex sola matre fieri*" see Augustine, *S.* 289 and *Ep.* 157, 3.

110 See Chapter 2 note 98.

111 Saxer (1988), 591 for instance only notes the similarities in the rites of purification mentioned.

112 For a more detailed study of what follows here about the destiny of Augustine's liturgical argument and the influence of Prosper in the later reception, see Pignot, M., 'Baptismal Exorcism as Proof of Original Sin: the Legacy of Augustine's Liturgical Argument in the Early Medieval West', in Villegas Marín, R., (ed.), *Pelagianism in the Christian Sources from 431 to the Carolingian Period* (Leuven), SP (forthcoming).

*auctoritates de gratia Dei*—later attached to pope Celestinus's Letter 21—to refute Julian of Eclanum, on the basis of Augustine's arguments.<sup>113</sup> In particular, Prosper employed Augustine's argument that the prayers made at the altar for each category of people (pagans, catechumens, penitents, faithful) demonstrate the need for purification from sin through the grace of God.<sup>114</sup> For the purposes of this broader demonstration, he also borrowed Augustine's argument based on exorcisms and exsufflations performed on infants, but significantly extended it to include *iuvenes* who seek baptism.<sup>115</sup> Later, pope Gelasius I (492–496) used the same liturgical argument of Augustine and Prosper, with the same biblical quotation from Colossians against Pelagians to enforce infant baptism for the cleansing of original sin in a letter to the bishops of Picenum sent on 1 November 493.<sup>116</sup> John, like Prosper and Gelasius, is a witness of the influence of Augustine's liturgical argument against Pelagians in later discussions of the catechumenate and baptism. He appears to be particularly close

113 See Villegas Marín, R., (2003), 'En polémica con Julián de Eclanum: por una nueva lectura del *Syllabus de gratia* de Próspero de Aquitania', *Augustinianum* 43, 81–124 suggesting its composition in 439, and Delmulle, J., (2018), *Prosper d'Aquitaine contre Jean Cassien. Le Contra Collatorem, l'appel à Rome du parti augustinien dans la querelle postpélagienne* (Turnhout), 209 esp. n. 81.

114 *Praetitorum Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum auctoritates de gratia dei* (PL 51 (1846), 210 and (Celestinus), Ep. 21, 12 [PL 50 (1846), 536], 8–9): "*Cum enim sanctorum plebium praesules mandata sibimet legatione fundantur apud divinam clementiam, humani generis agunt causam, et tota secum Ecclesia congemiscende, postulant et precantur ut infidelibus donetur fides [...] ut denique, catechumenis ad regenerationis sacramenta perductis, coelestis misericordiae aula reseretur. Haec autem non perfunctorie neque inaniter a Domino peti, rerum ipsarum monstrat effectus: quandoquidem ex omni errorum genere plurimos Deus dignatur attrahere, quos erutos de potestate tenebrarum, transferat in regnum filii charitatis suae* (cf. Col 1, 13) *et ex vasis irae faciat vasa misericordiae* (cf. Rm 9, 22)". On this passage and the inheritance of Augustine's argument see Villegas Marín (2003), 91–94. For Clerck, P. de, (1978), "Lex orandi, lex credendi": Sens originel et avatars historiques d'un adage équivoque', *QL* 59, 193–212, at 203–204. Prosper may have borrowed in particular from Augustine, Ep. 217.

115 Ibid. 9: "*Illud etiam quod circa baptizandos in universo mundo sancta Ecclesia uniformiter agit, non otioso contemplamur intuitu. Cum sive parvuli, sive iuvenes ad regenerationis veniunt sacramentum, non prius fontem vitae adeunt quam exorcismis et exsufflationibus clericorum spiritus ab eis immundus abigatur [...]*". Compare this with Augustine, *Gr. et pecc. or.* II, 40.45 and other texts explored in Chapter 2, pp. 114–116.

116 Gelasius, Ep. 6, 5 (= JK 621), numbering according to Thiel's edition: "*Hinc est, quod exsufflantur et catechizantur infantes, [...] eruti de potestate tenebrarum* (Col 1, 13), *sicut docet apostolus, ad Filii Dei sortem purgationemque legitimam transferuntur*" (Thiel, A., (ed.), (1867–1868), *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum a S. Hilario usque ad Pelag. II*, volume 1 (Brumberg), 330).

to Prosper since he employs the argument made from the rites performed on infants to more broadly justify the necessity of the catechumenate for adults and infants alike. He applied the argument to demonstrate the existence of original sin, the pervasiveness of sin and the need for purification through baptism.

A comparison between John's and Gelasius' letters and the other cited sources in which the liturgical argument is displayed shows a remarkable difference that may help shed further light on John's peculiar description of the catechesis. Gelasius used the verbs *exsufflare* and *catechizare*, thus employing *catechizare*, a word meant to refer to oral instruction, instead of *exorcizare* as in Augustine and Prosper.<sup>117</sup> This, of course, recalls John's emphasis on rituals in his description of the catechesis. The different terminology shows that while both borrowed from Augustine or later fifth-century sources, they also developed a more flexible use of the terms pertaining to catechesis. *Catechizare* could be applied both to infants and adults: while infants were brought to baptism by godparents who would receive the catechesis in their place,<sup>118</sup> in Late Antiquity, more broadly, there was clearly an intimate link between the oral instruction and the rites performed, as is clear from all the African sermons to catechumens examined in this book. Both exorcism and catechesis are words spoken meant to separate the hearers from the Devil and enact a transformation in them, be they adults or infants. The instruction given to candidates in the form of catechesis could perfectly be described as a ritual performance related to exorcism. Thus, it is too restrictive to strictly distinguish catechesis from rituals and instruction for adults from instructions for infants: Gelasius' and John's description of the catechesis were not necessarily breaking with tradition, but only closely associated oral instruction with rites of purification, in the same way as preachers did before them.

It is not ascertained, however, whether John borrowed directly from Augustine or Prosper, or from both. It should be noted that John's use of the same liturgical argument as Prosper—listing catechumens amongst other groups, with the quotation from Colossians<sup>119</sup>—fits well with the revival of polemics around grace and the reception of Augustine's works in the early sixth century. In the last years of the fifth century or in the 500s, Eugippius of

117 Later, Bede would similarly borrow from Prosper's passage, with the same substitution of *catechizare* (*In primam partem Samuhelis* 3, 17).

118 John mentions godparents, see *Ep. ad Sen.* 7. For an overview of godparenthood in the West until the sixth century see Dujarier (1962), 37–67; Lynch (1986), 83–140.

119 See note 114.

Lucullanum prepared his famous florilegium of Augustine's works, including a significant anti-Pelagian dossier.<sup>120</sup> Even closer to John's letter, in 520, the African bishop Possessor, staying in Constantinople, asked pope Hormisdas for his opinion about the works of Faustus of Riez on grace, and received a reply commending instead the works of Augustine and anti-Pelagian *capitula* most probably to be identified with Prosper's *Auctoritates*.<sup>121</sup> In the same letter, Hormisdas attacked a group of Scythian monks who had come to Rome in 519 and sought his support because they were involved in a Christological controversy over the formula that they promoted—*unus ex trinitate Christus, qui pro nobis est carne passus*, leading to what is called the theopaschite controversy.<sup>122</sup> At the same period, these monks, lead by the deacon Peter, wrote to the African bishops exiled in Cagliari to seek their support in the controversy. Their letter is openly anti-Pelagian and pro-Augustinian, condemning Pelagius and Celestius, as well as Faustus of Riez, and notably including an extract from Prosper's *Auctoritates* 8–9 containing the liturgical argument evoked above.<sup>123</sup> It seems clear

120 Villegas Marín, R., 'The Anti-Pelagian Dossier of Eugippius' *Excerpta ex operibus sancti Augustini* in Context: Notes on the Reception of Augustine's Works on Grace and Predestination in Late Fifth-Early Sixth Century Rome', in Delmulle, J., Partoens, G., Boodts, S., Dupont, A., (eds.), *Flores Augustini. Augustinian Florilegia in the Middle Ages* (Leuven) forthcoming in 2020. For the date of Eugippius' *Excerpta* see Delmulle, J., Pezé, W., (2016), 'Un manuscrit de travail d'Eugippe: le ms. Città del Vaticano, BAV, Pal. lat. 210', *SEJG* 55, 195–258, at 203–204.

121 Hormisdas, *Ep* 124, 4: "*Hi vero, quos vos de Fausti cujusdam galli antistitis dictis consulis litteris indicastis, id sibi responsum habeant: neque illum neque quemquam, quos in auctoritatem patrum non recipit examen, catholicae fidei aut ecclesiasticae disciplinae ambiguitatem posse gignere, aut religiosis praejudicium comparare. [...]*"; 5: "*De arbitrio tamen libero et gratia Dei quid romana hoc est catholica sequatur et servet ecclesia, licet in variis libris beati Augustini, et maxime ad Hilarium et Prosperum, possit cognosci, tamen et in scriniis ecclesiasticis expressa capitula continentur, quae si tibi desunt et necessaria creditis, destinabimus*" (Thiel (1867–1868), 926–931 at 929–930) = *Collectio Avellana, Ep.* 231 (Guenther, O., *CSEL* 35/2 (1898), 696–700, at 699–700); see 'Possessor', *PCBE* 1 (1982), 889.

122 For the context behind the anti-Pelagian stances of this letter see the study of Villegas Marín quoted in note 120. On the broader context (the arrival of the monks in Rome and the theopaschite controversy) see Glorie, F., *CSEL* 85A (1978), XXII–XL; McGuckin, J.A., (1984), 'The "Theopaschite Confession" (Text and Historical Context): a Study in the Cyrilline Re-interpretation of Chalcedon', *JEH* 35, 239–255, at 239–246; Sotinel (2001), 246–249; Moreau, D., (2017), 'Les moines scythes néochalcédoniens (de Zaldapa?). Étude préliminaire à une prosopographie chrétienne du Diocèse des Thraces', *добръжска* 32, 187–202, esp. 191–196.

123 Peter (and others), *Epistula Petri diaconi et aliorum qui in causa fidei Romam directi fuerant* 27 (see Fraipont, J., (ed.), *CCL* 91A (1968), 551–562, at 561–562 (reply at 563–615) and Glorie, *CCL* 85A (1978), 157–172, at 171–172).

that Prosper's text was readily available in the archives in Rome and had become the authoritative statement of the pope Celestine against Pelagian views.<sup>124</sup>

The polemical background of John's borrowings opens new perspectives concerning the letter. It seems reductive to state with Gillett that Senarius' questions were prompted by the desire to proselytise among Goths and that John's focus was on "liturgy" rather than "theology" and apologetics.<sup>125</sup> It remains uncertain whether Senarius' questions had themselves been prompted by a context of rivalry with Arians, or the polemics over grace and free will, or whether they were only genuine questions raised about the purpose of the catechumenate. However, John's reply clearly took the questions as the starting point for a demonstration of Augustine's anti-Pelagian argument that baptism was performed to cleanse both original and own sins. Contrary to other contemporary writers borrowing from Augustine, Prosper, and other authorities, John remained totally silent about the sources used in his synthesis: however, the polemical background of his presentation of the catechumenate appears clearly. John only mentioned the *maiores* perhaps because he mainly drew from sources found in his library in Rome, like Prosper's *Auctoritates*, that he considered part of the heritage of his Church—particularly as they became attached to pope Celestinus' decretal.<sup>126</sup> While the precise dating of John's letter remains uncertain, particularly since he cannot be identified with certainty with the future pope John, it is still relevant to underline that the anti-Pelagian statements in his presentation of the catechumenate, and probable use of Prosper's *Auctoritates*, fit well with the anti-Pelagian polemics in Rome in 519–520 and the pope Hormisdas' and the Scythian monks' resort to the same work.

John used his letter to circulate a synthesis on the catechumenate, while, as he said to Senarius, a more thorough refutation of Pelagians and other heretics

124 Later, *Auctoritates* 8–9 are again copied in a number of sources, most of them probably through the diffusion of the work in the second recension of Dionysius' canonical collection, the related *Hispana* collection and the *Concordia canonum* of Cresconius: Dionysius, *Collectio decretorum, Decreta Coelestini papae* (PL 67 (1848), 269–274) = Cresconius Africanus, *Concordia canonum*, 288–298, 296–298 for the *Auctoritates* (Zechiel-Eckes, K., (1992), *Die Concordia canonum des Cresconius. Studien und Edition* (Frankfurt am Main), 782–797). Thus the argument of Prosper is copied in the augmented version of Gennadius' *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum* 30–32 (PL 58 (1847), 987–988) and in a Latin pseudo-Chrysostom sermon, probably as a later interpolation to the original text: JO-N 23 (*Inc.: "Deus noster faciens hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem suam* (Gn 1, 26), *dedit praeceptum in creatura*"). See Pignot, 'Baptismal exorcism' for more details. Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 11, 21 recapitulates the tradition, using John's letter, amongst others.

125 Gillett (2003), 217–218.

126 See note 106 for the distinction between the *maiores* and foreign authorities.

was given in the anonymous treatise on heresies that he sent with his letter.<sup>127</sup> John's summary of tradition, drawing on African material and particularly Augustine in a polemical context can also be compared to Eugippius' large collection of excerpts from Augustine's works, which include a substantial section on initiation.<sup>128</sup> The letter to Senarius is therefore much more than a list of the rites of the catechumenate and other liturgical customs. It is a justification of the catechumenate and a defence of Augustine's teaching on grace in the context of the disputed reception of his writings, based on liturgical arguments and authoritative pro-Augustinian writings. John's letter shows that the catechumenate remained an important stake in doctrinal debates and even deserved detailed discussion in aristocratic circles in a period of growing need for authoritative summaries on the Christian liturgy. Augustine and his followers had a deep influence on this process in Italy perhaps as much as in Africa.

### 3 Conclusion

Despite differences arising from their context of composition, the two letter exchanges explored share essential preoccupations and address the problems raised in a similar way. Ferrandus' letter and Fulgentius' reply are learned conversations between clerics about pastoral problems arising from the administration of the rites of initiation, attempting to draft a clear response from the church authorities. By contrast, John's letter is a defence and interpretation of Roman liturgical practices during the Lenten and Easter periods in reply to the questions of a powerful layman. However, both exchanges, in the form of questions and answers, aim at drawing syntheses on the catechumenate to justify the existence of liturgical practices, their necessity and utility, on the basis of authorities of the past in a context of polemics against heretics. Thus, clerics replying to consultations developed normative stances on the catechumenate through the recourse to a shared tradition. Far from merely ritualising the catechumenate, John, Ferrandus and Fulgentius used the liturgy, as Augustine, Prosper and Gelasius did, as the basis to argue fundamental points, raise issues, convince correspondents and refute opponents.

<sup>127</sup> John, *Ep. ad Sen.* 9.

<sup>128</sup> On initiation see Eugippius, *Excerpta* CLXXXVI. 204 "*Ex libro de catechizandis rudibus. Quod antiquos iustos caput christus velut manum praemiserit nasciturus*" (= Augustine, *Cat. rud.* 3.6–4.7) to CCXXII. 240 "*Ex epistula ad Seleucianam. An Apostoli fuerint baptizati*" (= Augustine, *Ep.* 265, 1–5), following Knoll's numbering in *CSEL* 9/1 (1885), 630–712.



In early sixth-century Carthage and Rome, liturgical practices of initiation were under the spotlight and at the centre of doctrinal controversies. It is speculative to draw any general conclusion on the basis of a handful of letters; however, it is still tempting to suggest that the early sixth-century represented a time of particularly intense debate and reflection on the liturgy of initiation. As Brown put it: "We are dealing with persons who were deeply committed to bringing the Early Christian past into the present. They wished to make it available in the condensed form of digests, anthologies, and encyclopaedic compilations; to turn the recommendations of ancient Christian authors and the rules of former Christian councils into a finely calibrated system of rules, adjusted to the needs of pastoral guidance".<sup>129</sup> As in the preceding century, in a context of renewed division, laymen and clerics alike required written commentaries and rules on the liturgy to give authority and unity to their religious community. Divisions, local diversity and change were significant challenges: while writing to defend and explain inherited traditions, clerics brought together their immediate experience of the liturgy and the writings of their predecessors to develop new comprehensive statements on the catechumenate that helped stabilise these traditions into a coherent set of rules. In this process, the reception of Augustine's writings played a crucial role, serving as a way to renew debates and practices of the catechumenate.

The progressive crystallisation of practices and ideas in a polemical context is perhaps the most accurate way of describing the evolution of the catechumenate at the dawn of the Middle Ages. When comparing this material to the evidence explored for fifth-century Africa, particularly Augustine, it appears clearly, contrary to what scholars have assumed, that there was no fundamental "break with tradition", but instead a deep interest in claiming this earlier tradition.<sup>130</sup> Both exchanges show that adults and infants alike were initiated, while practices varied locally, were questioned and subject to polemical debates. In the early sixth century, the catechumenate still represented a crucial stake for the formation of Christian communities and Augustine's and other Africans' writings were an essential material to deal with, and renew, these debates. Despite common assumptions, John's letter, its focus on rituals and its anti-Pelagian tone, cannot be used as evidence for the generalisation of infant baptism. The Pelagian controversy and its reception revolved around broader issues: John's and Fulgentius' letters provided syntheses to demonstrate the need for ritual cleansing through clerical performance in order to

<sup>129</sup> Brown (2013), 25.

<sup>130</sup> Stenzel (1958), 204 employs the phrase twice about John's letter.

obtain eternal life. They dealt with the same recurrent pastoral problems of earlier generations. However, the summaries provided to solve these problems were also part of a new trend: the progressive fixing of ritual practices in written form and the growing recourse to Christian authorities of the past. Their combination led to the creation of an authoritative tradition and created the premises for a greater uniformity of practices and theological interpretations.<sup>131</sup> There is no extant African source for the catechumenate after Fulgentius; however, most of the preserved texts discussed in this book were read and copied in the Carolingian period by and for clerics still involved in new polemics over grace and predestination and striving to promote standard baptismal practices across the Empire.<sup>132</sup> Augustine's writings, and more broadly African texts, were widely read and influential for centuries, playing a crucial role in successive attempts to bring greater uniformity to theological views and initiation practices from the Middle Ages through to the present day.

131 For the reception of Fulgentius in later centuries, see Laistner, M.L.W., (1928), 'Fulgentius in the Ninth Century', *Mélanges Hrouchevsky* (Kiev), 445–456 reprinted as Id., (1957), 'Fulgentius in the Carolingian Age', in Id., (1957), *The Intellectual Heritage of the Early Middle Ages: Selected Essays* (Ithaca), 202–215, esp. 211–215; Hays, G., (2010), 'Fulgentius and His Medieval Readers', in Piras (2010), 105–146; Delmulle, J., (2016), 'L'autre *expositio* augustiniennne de Florus de Lyon: les *Sententiae a beato Fulgentio expositae* de la Collection des douze Pères', in Chambert-Protat, P., Dolveck, F., Gerzaguët, C. (eds.), (2016), *Les Douze compilations pauliniennes de Florus de Lyon: un carrefour des traditions patristiques au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Rome), 121–147 [available online: <http://books.openedition.org/efr/3091>]. This reception is linked to Augustine's as Fulgentius' works often circulated under his name. For John's letter to Senarius, particularly influential in Carolingian texts on baptism, see, as a starting point, Keefe, S., (2002), *Water and the Word. Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire* (Notre Dame IN), Volume 1: A Study of Texts and Manuscripts, 70–79 and 80–84 and Volume 11: Editions of the Texts, esp. 154–208 (Texts 1 to 4) and 238–245.

132 On the significance of doctrinal debates in the Carolingian period, inheriting Augustine's and his contemporaries' controversies over grace and baptism, see Pezé, W., (2017), *Le virus de l'erreur. La controverse carolingienne sur la double prédestination. Essai d'histoire sociale* (Turnhout), esp. 431–456 (considering annotations in Carolingian manuscripts of Augustine).

# Epilogue

This book has offered the first broad historical investigation on the catechumenate in late antique Africa, considering it as both a progressive initiation process and a peculiar way of being Christian. Starting from the experience of Augustine himself as a *catechumenus*, research has been extended to a broader corpus of texts of Augustine and his literary production has been put in a wider African context. Paying attention to the context of composition of each source and adopting a longer chronology from the fourth to the sixth century, the investigation has shown that in Late Antiquity belonging was progressively acquired with a number of specific rituals for catechumens and debated in polemics, while practices varied widely even within Africa, precisely at a time when first attempts were made to set new normative rules.

The catechumenate enabled a progressive integration of converts and brought the broader community to redefine itself as it welcomed new members. This organisation was the outcome of an effective compromise: converts gradually learnt about their new religion and tested their commitment, while religious communities monitored the integration process and constantly reflected on the core beliefs and practices that would lead their community to stand out and attract converts. This compromise had downsides for clerics like Augustine who aimed at building a united community and imposing strict rules: the liminal status of catechumens meant that they were less liable to religious authority and could more easily change sides. Thus, they constituted an essential stake in a context of divisions and polemics between Christian communities.

As particularly shown for Augustine—through a combined study of sermons, letters and treatises—and for early sixth-century letters, the views of clerics were not simply imposed on the audience but were a matter of debate and dialogue, both with catechumens and with other clerics and laymen attempting to define alternative rules at a time of varying practices and religious polemics. Augustine's writings and contemporary canonical legislation show that clerics notably aimed to draw a clear distinction between the *catechumeni* and the *fideles* in terms of rituals and set high requirements in matters of behaviour. As shown by Augustine's concern for bringing catechumens to baptism in a variety of contexts beyond customary liturgical calls for baptism, the boundaries that were drawn in the community had to be temporary and were meant to be overcome. Moreover, canonical legislation already suggests that beyond strict regulations, *catechumeni* could be initiated more freely than generally assumed. Augustine's writings also shed light on the fact that

catechumens could both genuinely assert their Christian belonging and have an open understanding of it, hoping to share benefits beyond strict control from church authorities, rules of behaviour and baptism. This explains why the negotiation of the catechumens' transition towards baptism was particularly important for church authorities.

As demonstrated in our investigation of Augustine's writings and contemporary sermons, clerics saw the integration of catechumens as a tool for renewing the commitment of the wider community and to define Christian membership against opponents. Augustine strove to impose discipline from the very beginning of the catechumenate, employing the foundational rite of the cross on the forehead to bring cohesion to the community and setting a number of rules of admission for catechumens before they could be baptised in the *De fide et operibus*. Similarly Augustine's writings and contemporary fifth-century sermons show that the baptismal preparation was meant to develop a distinctive sense of belonging through major rituals of enrolment, renunciation of the Devil, profession of faith and learning of the Lord's Prayer, coupled with extensive catecheses reinforcing the boundaries of the community. From the fourth to the sixth century, Augustine, Fulgentius and John acted as experts, employing their skills to rally catechumens to their party thanks to authoritative syntheses.

From the example of Augustine himself, particularly in the *Confessiones*, to the emergency baptism of a slave narrated in Ferrandus' letter, this investigation has shown both the fluid nature of Christian membership and the problems that it raised, as repeated attempts were made to assert clerical authority over catechumens in a context of widespread division. In turn, the competition for members fuelled the creativity of clerics and explains the variety of the preserved evidence on the catechumenate. A reconsideration of Augustine's evidence for the baptismal preparation, together with the study of African fifth-century sermons shows that variations and originality in terms of rites and catecheses resist any attempt to reconstruct a standard organisation of the initiation, even within a single region like Africa.

Moreover, the continuous importance of the catechumenate as a way of being Christian and the resurgence of pastoral problems raised since Augustine's time lead us to reconsider modern assumptions about the supposed "ritualisation" of early medieval Christianity. Tracing the development of liturgical arguments from Augustine to the sixth century, this book has provided a better explanation of the significance of rituals, identifying their major role in controversies as trustworthy sources of authority. Augustine was the first to systematically employ the practices of catechumens as an argument to reject opponents and define the boundaries of his community, first against the Donatists to strengthen his condemnation of rebaptism, then against Pela-

gians, repeatedly resorting to the rites of exorcism during the catechumenate to demonstrate the necessity of the forgiveness of sins for infants. Fifth-century sermons inherited the anti-Donatist argument and applied it against Arians, while sixth-century letters founded their demonstrations of the necessity and efficacy of the catechumenate in ritual practices, paired with biblical interpretations and the creative reception of a Christian written tradition, in which Augustine features prominently. Thus, it has been shown that the catechumenate is of crucial importance to study the process of Christianisation and the dynamics behind the formation, internal organisation and interaction of Christian communities in a context of changing ritual practices and polemical debates.

The two-fold division between the catechumens and the baptised is a major feature of Christian communities that largely nuances the widespread assumption that becoming a Christian meant to adopt a single uniform identity. New light may be shed on the spread of Christianity by integrating this internal complexity of Christian communities in broader overviews. This investigation is the starting point for other regional studies on catechumens and the catechumenate in the East (Greece, Anatolia, Near East and Egypt) and in the West (Italy, Gaul, Spain), examining a broad range of sources and adopting a historical perspective over a long chronology. Such detailed regional studies are required to reach a better understanding of the catechumenate and critically compare the evidence. A careful analysis of each source in its specific context shall provide further ground to identify common patterns and highlight the variety of local practices against any unwarranted standardisation. Comparative studies beyond Christianity provide another main field for future research. Two-fold memberships with corresponding degrees of commitment and ritual participation, attested notably amongst Manichaeans and Jews, may be beneficially compared to the catechumenate, leading to a better understanding of how religious communities negotiated the integration of new members in Late Antiquity and beyond.

While there are no African sources for the catechumenate beyond the sixth century, this book also provides the basis to explore the historical evolution of initiation in the West until the ninth century at least. The development in the sixth century of new authoritative syntheses setting norms for the initiation was only the beginning of an evolution that would reach its peak in later centuries. As I started this project some years ago, I envisaged an exploration of this later evolution on a larger scale, embracing Africa and Italy until the ninth century, to understand how initiation evolved from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. The outcomes of this research show that early medieval writers are better understood by evaluating what they owe to their late antique pre-

decessors in terms of their interest in Christian initiation and baptism. I have particularly stressed that the catechumenate was not only an initiation process comprising a number of rituals but also a peculiar way of being Christian, that was at the centre of polemical controversies. The straightforward narrative of the decline of the catechumenate with the generalisation of infant baptism delineates too neat a break between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, failing to provide answers on the continued importance of the catechumenate in late antique sources. The results of this investigation suggest that infant baptism had yet to become the norm in the sixth century, and that it did not simply replace the catechumenate. Indeed, infant baptism, a one-time performance and the starting point of religious membership, could not concretely replace the catechumenate as a way of being Christian and acquiring a sense of religious belonging through teaching and rituals. One would now learn about religion and progress in terms of religious commitment only after baptism.<sup>1</sup>

Research is needed on how and when this two-fold organisation progressively gave way to new models for acquiring and manifesting religious belonging. Institutions developed to address this new situation. In the West, the development of monasticism may have provided a response to infant baptism, when a new hierarchy of progressive commitment to Christianity was transferred from Christian communities to the more restricted circle of the monastery. Such an investigation would renew the field by connecting late antique evidence to its reception in Carolingian times. The spread of Augustine's works pertaining to the catechumenate may also be further traced in the manuscript evidence and in literary borrowings in later centuries, particularly in a monastic context, to assess to what extent and how his works influenced change and continuity in ritual practices during the Early Middle Ages.

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1 This also required the development of a new theology of baptism, fully integrating infant baptism, see Cramer, P., (1993), *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200–c. 1150* (Cambridge); Neyrinck, A., (2015), 'Le lien de *caritas* dans la société chrétienne médiévale et la justification du baptême des enfants en bas-âge', *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 15 [online], last consulted 30 August 2019: <http://journals.openedition.org/acrh/6674>; DOI: 10.4000/acrh.6674.

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